Learning To Feel

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Learning To Feel

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Summary

Satsuki wonders if she'll ever be comfortable with intimacy after all she's been through. Meanwhile, a certain no-star is determined to show her that not all intimacy has to be bad.

Monday

If ever Satsuki needed a reminder of how much her life had changed, Movie Night more than served that purpose.

Of course, just about every night was Movie Night nowadays: after yet another endless day of business meetings and hard negotiations and conference calls, Satsuki wanted nothing more than to turn off her brain for a while, and sitting on a sofa watching films with Ryuko and Mako was just what the doctor ordered. Tea, good company, and welcome distractions.

Some of the distractions were more welcome than others, however. Ryuko and Mako were obviously still in something of a honeymoon phase, and most nights could barely keep their hands off of one another. They didn't even seem conscious of it, either: it just sort of happened on its own over the course of the movie. On nights when the movie was particularly bad, Satsuki would often have difficulty keeping her eyes on the screen.

Tonight's movie was particularly abysmal, and while the two lovebirds were having a great time laughing at it and mocking it, Satsuki found that she could not engage herself enough to do even that. She kept finding herself making sidelong glances at Ryuko's hand slowly rubbing up and down along Mako's thigh, or Mako's hand slipping under Ryuko's pyjama top. On the one hand, it was nice to know that they felt comfortable enough around her to be affectionate with one another, but on the other hand...

“Satsuki-sama?” said Mako suddenly. Satsuki blinked and looked up at the former no-star, only to see that both of the other girls were looking intently at her, and only then did Satsuki realize that she had been staring.

“I'm... sorry,” she said, turning to focus her eyes on the nonsensical images flitting across the screen. She felt her face heat up, and wondered how deeply she might be blushing.

“Are we embarrassing you, nee-chan?” Ryuko asked teasingly.

“Ryuko-chan, that's not nice,” Mako chided her girlfriend. “Um, but I guess it's a good question. Does it bug you that we're all cuddly, Satsuki-sama?”

“You've earned the right to be happy with one another,” Satsuki said levelly. “By all means, enjoy yourselves.”

“But... if it makes Satsuki-sama uncomfortable, we can enjoy ourselves later,” Mako said in reply.

“I'm not uncomfortable,” Satsuki said, even though it was a flat-out lie.

“Then why are you blushing?” Ryuko asked, though at least it was in a less teasing tone.

Satsuki felt herself frowning tightly. “I'm not uncomfortable,” she insisted. “If anything, I'm jealous.”

“Satsuki-sama?” Mako gasped, and Satsuki realized that she had said too much.

“I only wish closeness came as easily to me as it does to you,” Satsuki explained, hoping that this would be enough.

“I think I get it,” said Ryuko. “You don't like being touched because of...” She did not finish the sentence, but she didn't have to. Satsuki knew enough to realize that Ryuko had also had a brief taste of their mother's abuse.

Mako's eyes widened. “You- you don't like being touched?” she asked Satsuki. “You mean all the times I've hugged you and played with your hair and held onto your arm and leaned on you? You don't like it? I'm so sorry, Satsuki-sama!”

“It's not that, Mako,” Satsuki smiled thinly. “It was a little strange at first, maybe, but I don't mind your hugs.” Her face darkened. “Friendly contact has actually been very welcome. What I envy about the two of you is... your intimacy.”

“You mean like sexy touching?” Mako asked.

“You could call it that,” Satsuki agreed. She wondered how much Mako knew, and wondered whether Ryuko might have told her anything about Ragyo's abominable tendencies. “In my life,” she said slowly, “that kind of touching has never been 'sexy,' however. It has instead been used only for power and manipulation.” She closed her eyes. “I wonder sometimes if I will ever be able to experience that sort of intimacy without thinking of it as...”

“You think letting someone touch you means giving them power over you,” Mako nodded.

Both Satsuki and Ryuko gave Mako a look of surprise at this observation. “That- that's it exactly,” Satsuki stammered. “Right now, I don't know if I can trust anyone enough to get close to me without worrying about whether or not I'll be giving them power.”

Mako brightened. “Then you just need to find someone you CAN trust!”

Satsuki closed her eyes. “Mako, I just said...”

“Oh, I didn't mean someone else,” Mako said with a shake of her head. “Um... hold on a second, please?”

The former no-star leaned in to whisper something into Ryuko's ear, and the two of them had a brief, almost silent exchange before Ryuko nodded and gave a half-smile.

“Satsuki-sama, I have an idea,” said Mako, turning back to the older girl. “You don't have to do it, and I won't push if you get uncomfortable, but I really just want to help. Can I try?”

“What did you have in mind?” Satsuki asked, baffled at the possibilities.

Mako shifted on the couch so that she was kneeling and facing Satsuki. “Okay. Do you ever do self-exams, Satsuki-sama?”

“Self-exams?” Satsuki repeated, knitting her eyebrows together.

“You know, checking for lumps and stuff,” Mako explained. “Mom taught me how. It's super important for girls to do that, you know!”

The light dawned. “Oh! Well, no, I've never really...”

Mako frowned. “Well, we can worry about teaching you that later, then. This is kind of like that, only different.”

“Go on,” Satsuki said slowly.

“Okay. Start by taking your right hand, slipping it into your robe, and using it to cup your...” Mako paused in thought. “It doesn't feel right to say 'boob' to you, Satsuki-sama, so hold your left breast with it.”

“Very well,” Satsuki nodded doubtfully, sliding her hand through the gap in her robe. She could tell that she was starting to blush again, and she shot a desperate look to Ryuko, who was watching the proceedings with a thoughtful expression.

“That's perfect,” Mako smiled. “Now cross your other arm over, and put your left hand in the other side of your robe to hold your right breast.”

Satsuki complied, shifting her arms slightly to allow her hands to get in place. “Very well,” she repeated. “What next?”

“Well, that's it, for now,” Mako beamed. “There you go, Satsuki-sama! Now you're being touched by someone you know you can trust. It's kind of like giving yourself a hug, isn't it? Now you can relax and enjoy the movie!”

Still smiling happily, Mako leaned over to carefully hug Satsuki, then returned to cuddling against Ryuko, leaving Satsuki nothing short of stunned.

Lacking much alternative, Satsuki turned her attention back to the screen. As before, she found herself unable to concentrate on the movie, but this time it was for different reasons.

She had to admit that she liked the metaphor Mako had used: it really DID feel like she was giving herself a hug. It seemed strange to be holding her own breasts in her hands, though. Why this, rather than just crossing her arms more tightly across herself? It wasn't as though she had never touched them before, after all.

The more she thought about it, though, the more she realized that she had never touched them quite like this. This wasn't bathing, or adjusting herself to better fit into her bra: this was contact simply for the sake of contact.

As a consequence, it was a feeling quite unlike anything she had ever experienced. She had always been aware of her breasts, at least as long as she had had them, but she could not recall a time that she had paid this kind of attention to them.

She had to admit that she liked the way they felt in her hands, and she liked the way her hands felt on them. It was comforting, somehow, and she realized that Mako had been right. These were HER hands. No one was trying to take anything from her, or dominate her, or

discomfort her. These were her hands, and this was her body, and she belonged to no one but herself.

The last thought came with such clarity that Satsuki nearly gasped.

With something as simple as this, she was taking another step toward reclaiming herself.

Suddenly aware that her heart was beating faster, Satsuki slowly adjusted her hands around her breasts, testing their weight, their fullness, and their texture. The smooth curves along the undersides, and the tiny raised bumps around the nipples. A warmth and a softness that were part of her, and belonged to her.

It felt marvelous. Not in an erotic sense- at least, she didn't think so- but in the sense that this was something to be enjoyed instead of feared.

But then she thought of other hands touching her in this way, and felt herself shiver. She instinctively tightened her hands around herself, intensifying the self-hug and trying to take comfort in her own warmth. To her surprise, the darker thoughts passed quickly, leaving her to once again focus on the sensations of holding and of being held.

Somewhere a thousand miles away, the movie came to an end, and Ryuko picked up the remote control to switch off the television, leaving the room in welcome silence.

“Mako...” Satsuki whispered.

“Yes, Satsuki-sama?”

“Why did you ask me to try this?”

Mako paused for a moment before answering. “So that you could get used to how it feels to be held,” the younger girl then said. “Do you like it?”

Satsuki considered this carefully. “Honestly? I do... but only because I know it's me. I doubt I could trust anyone else this much yet.”

“Not even your Elite Four?” Ryuko asked, her voice unusually gentle. “I bet any one of them would jump at the opportunity. They'd do anything you asked.”

“No,” Satsuki said, shaking her head. “While I would trust them with my life, I... do not believe I could trust them with my body. Gamagori would place me on a pedestal to be admired like a marble statue. Inumuta would study me like a new specimen, more concerned with gathering data. Sanageyama would likely see me as the ultimate conquest, and Nonon...” She closed her eyes, wishing with all her heart that she felt otherwise. “Nonon loves me, but she has always been possessive of me, and I fear that she would treat me as just that: a possession.”

Ryuko gave a low whistle. “Damn,” she whispered.

“It's okay, Satsuki-sama,” Mako said softly. “I guess you've been living your whole life with people who wanted to use you for something, huh?”

“You could say that,” Satsuki replied, once again surprised at the girl's observations, not to mention her tendency to get right to the heart of the matter.

“Well, then from now on, this is going to be a safe place for you,” Mako nodded, a determined look on her face. “Ryuko-chan and I won't use you for anything or take anything away from you. Right, Ryuko-chan?”

“Yeah, sure,” Ryuko agreed, though she didn't look like she quite knew what Mako was talking about.

“You may not believe it yet,” Mako added, “but you can trust us, too.”

Satsuki looked into Mako's eyes for a while, studying the earnestness in her expression. “I would... I would like for that to be true.”

“Then we can keep working on it until you realize it is,” Mako shrugged, smiling softly at her senior.

Tuesday

The next day, they were barely past the opening credits of the movie before Mako got right down to business. “I had an idea for something we could try tonight, Satsuki-sama. Um, only if you want to, of course!”

Satsuki exchanged glances with Ryuko, and was somewhat surprised at the amused look on her sister's face. “Tell me, then,” Satsuki asked.

“I was wondering if you'd let me rub your back and shoulders,” Mako smiled. “You always look so tense when you get home, even after you've had your bath, and I thought maybe I could help.”

“I'd take her up on it if I were you,” Ryuko added. “She's damned good at it.”

“It's a gift,” Mako giggled at her girlfriend. “So what do you think, Satsuki-sama?”

“That sounds like it might be nice,” Satsuki admitted. It meant allowing someone else's hands on her, but if it was for something like a massage that was probably okay.

Besides, it was Mako. There was much that Satsuki still did not understand about the girl, but she knew enough to see that Mako meant her no harm.

“Great!” Mako grinned, bouncing briefly on the couch and clapping her hands together.

“Shall I kneel on the floor in front of you, then?” Satsuki asked, moving to get up.

“Oh, no!” Mako gasped. “I'd never ask Satsuki-sama to sit on the floor! I'll go around and stand behind you.”

“That won't be necessary,” Satsuki insisted, standing up from the sofa and looking back at the younger girl. “I'm not your school president any longer, Mako. I'll sit here.”

“At least have a cushion, then?” Mako asked, grabbing one of the throw pillows and holding it out to her.

“Very well,” Satsuki smiled, accepting the pillow. She set it beneath her and then settled down to her knees, with her back to the couch. She placed her hands in her lap while Mako repositioned herself, sitting with one leg to either side of the older girl.

“Now, Satsuki-sama?” Mako said in a soft voice. “I can give you a good massage with your robe still on, but it would probably be even better without it. That's completely up to you, though. Whatever you're okay with.”

Mako's obvious concern and desire to reassure was actually kind of charming, in spite of the very real and very dark reasons why they were necessary. Even though it was a little bit of a paradox, Satsuki normally did not have much trouble with nudity, largely because she knew

that she was capable of defending herself. She had meant every word the day that she had told Ryuko in battle that she would feel no shame exposing her body while wearing Junketsu if it meant advancing her toward her goals.

Still, even though she knew she had nothing to fear here, she hesitated before slipping the robe over her shoulders. This felt different for some reason.

“You don't have to,” Mako reminded her.

Hearing that was enough to break her hesitation. Satsuki pulled her arms from the sleeves of her robe and let gravity pull the thick, silky fabric down to her hips, leaving her bare from the waist up. Before she was even conscious of doing so, she crossed her arms over her chest to cover her breasts.

“That's a good idea, Satsuki-sama,” Mako said from behind her. “You can practice what you were doing last night while I do this.”

Even though that was not what had prompted her to cover herself, Satsuki decided to run with that, and she shifted her hands to cup her breasts again. Somehow, the now-familiar weight and softness of them in her hands was immediately comforting to her.

“Okay, let's see now,” Mako said thoughtfully, and then Satsuki felt the other girl lay her palms flat against her shoulder blades. Mako then slowly ran her hands up and down, just lightly tracing her fingers over the skin. “Oh, my,” she said then, pressing the tips of her fingers into the area directly between Satsuki's shoulder blades. She continued gently prodding Satsuki up and down, from the small of her back to where her shoulders met her neck.

“Satsuki-sama,” Mako said then, “I hate to say this, but you're a wreck. You're nothing but knots back here.”

“I guess always being in that regal stance finally got the better of you,” Ryuko said in mock sympathy.

“Is it really that bad?” Satsuki asked, somewhat surprised at the news. Even in her new life she had stayed active and kept up her sword practice. Surely she was better stretched out than that?

“It's sure not good,” Mako sighed. “Satsuki-sama, just to warn you, if you want me to get the worst of these knots out, it's probably gonna hurt a little.”

“Do what you need to,” Satsuki frowned, still not believing that it could be so dire.
Then, with a whispered “Here goes,” Mako dug the fingers of both hands into Satsuki's shoulders, at the same time pushing both thumbs deep into the muscles between her shoulder blades, just to either side of her spine. Satsuki felt an almost audible popping sensation where Mako's thumbs landed, and a sensation rather like an electric current shot from the middle of her back down both arms, all the way to the fingertips, causing her to involuntarily clutch her breasts almost painfully. She gasped, and Mako immediately stopped.

“Are you okay, Satsuki-sama? Was that too much?”

“I'm... that was... hah... don't stop, please,” she panted. Even though it had been momentarily agonizing, she sensed that this was still a good thing.

Mako resumed kneading Satsuki's back with both hands. The shock of it was not as intense this time, but with each circular motion of those thumbs Satsuki felt more pops and shocks as muscles she had not been aware existed snapped back and relaxed. At the same time, the grip of Mako's fingers between shoulders and neck caused first an intense burning feeling, followed by a slow, steady cooling.

With each rotation of her thumbs, Mako moved them slightly lower, finding still more knots of tension. Upon reaching a particularly bad spot, she actually grabbed Satsuki's shoulder with one hand to brace herself and then dug the heel of her other hand into the mass of tightness. This time Satsuki did not gasp so much as moan.

“Told you she was good,” Ryuko chuckled.

“It's the double-jointed thumbs,” Mako added. “Gives me more surface area to press down with.”

“Your hands are... very... strong...” Satsuki breathed.

“Sometimes it takes more than hands,” Mako replied. Quite suddenly, Satsuki felt Mako press the crown of her head against the center of Satsuki's back, then grasp both of her shoulders and pull back while pressing her own head forward. This time there came a series of very audible popping sounds, both from Satsuki's back and her shoulders. Satsuki's eyes went wide, but this time she did not cry out, and as the pressure eased, Satsuki felt like she could almost hear the blood rushing into all the places that had been unclenched.

“Ryuko-chan?” Mako said then. “Could you start a hot bath running, just in case?”

“You got it,” Ryuko nodded, getting up from the couch and heading off toward the bathroom.

“But I already... had a bath today...” Satsuki protested weakly.

“Just in case, Satsuki-sama,” Mako said again as she continued kneading up and down, her thumbs working from the center of the spine out. “Also, I need you to tell me right away if you feel sick to your stomach at all. We're working a lot of bad stuff loose right now, and it can get a little overwhelming if we're not careful. It's better to get the bad stuff out, of course, but you don't want to overload on it.”

“What do you mean... by bad stuff?” Satsuki whispered as Mako continued working, this time further from her spine.

“That depends on who you ask, Satsuki-sama,” Mako explained, shifting her hands to dig deeply around the older girl's left shoulder blade, then her right. “Some people say tense muscles contain a lot of toxins that build up because the blood doesn't flow through well enough to pick it all up. Some say these are places where you're blocked by bad chi, and that

your good energy can't flow through your body like it's supposed to. Others just say that when you get used to holding your tension for so long, it's just hard to let it all go."

Hard to let it all go. Satsuki wondered if Mako knew just how true that was. How much had Satsuki been holding in all these years? All the pain of having lost a sister she never knew, all the anger and confusion surrounding the death of her father, all the growing bitterness and fury at her mother even as she painstakingly carried out her plans, holding her secrets year after year, wondering who she could trust and how much...

"Bath's all ready," came Ryuko's voice, leading Satsuki to wonder how long these thoughts had been swirling through her conscious mind. With every stroke from Mako's hands, every push of her fingers and every circle of those amazing thumbs, Satsuki felt an aching warmth left behind, as though the hardened places inside her were being melted by liquid fire.

She felt her body beginning to resist, and she realized that she couldn't let go now. If she did, someone would find her out, or betray her to her mother, or take advantage of her weakness. She tried to tell herself that there were no secrets left to hide, that her mother was long gone, and that there was nobody here but the sister who had returned to her life and a girl who adored her unreservedly in spite of every hardship she had endured under Satsuki's regime. Still, the reflex to clamp down was strong after all these years of keeping her secrets.

In response to that reflex, she found herself trying to suppress it all, but Mako had taken away her hiding places, leaving doubt, fear and aching loneliness to course through her veins like the toxins that had been released into her blood. How long had she kept them locked up inside, and how much had collected within her over these horrible years?

"Satsuki-sama?" Mako whispered, and there was a worried catch in her voice.

That tiny shift of tone was the breaking point. The moment Satsuki heard that note of genuine concern directed at her, she felt the first tears come. Her mouth opened wide in a silent sob, as she could not find the breath to give it voice, and she was clutching herself so tightly that it was beginning to hurt.

In a flash, Ryuko was kneeling beside her, and Satsuki felt her sister's strong arms encircling her. "It's okay, nee-chan," she whispered. "You can let it out. No one's here to see it except us."

The dam broke, and Satsuki took a deep, shaky breath before letting it out in a messy, blubbering cry, her tears now coming in a flood. She flung her arms around her sister, holding onto her like a lifeline.

"Bring her to the bath, Ryuko-chan," Mako called from across the room, already halfway there herself.

"One second!" Ryuko called after her, clumsily patting Satsuki across the back. "Seriously, nee-chan, you're gonna be okay. I did the same thing the first time she gave me a good massage. It gets better, I promise."

Satsuki nodded damply against Ryuko's shoulder, and then found herself being effortlessly picked up and carried across the living room, down the hall and into the bathroom, where Mako was sprinkling something into the raised tub and swirling the waters with her free arm.

She didn't even have the strength to protest as Ryuko set her gingerly on her feet, slipped her robe the rest of the way off, then pulled off her underwear before picking her up again and carrying her to the tub. With great care, Ryuko gently lowered her into the water, seemingly heedless of the fact that she was getting her own pyjamas soaked in the process.

“Magnesium salts and lavender,” Mako said to her, though at first the words seemed like a non-sequitur. “The magnesium is to draw out the toxins and soothe the muscles, and the lavender oil is to help you calm down. I'm sorry, Satsuki-sama, I know it must feel like a lot, but you can't keep this stuff inside you any more.”

Even though she was still well beyond the capacity to do anything but sob, Satsuki found herself in agreement. For the first time in her life, she truly felt as though she were being cleansed, rather than the “purification” mockeries forced upon her by her mother. Like every good purge, though, she could already tell that it was going to be a slice of hell getting there.

Until then, though, as much as it hurt, she knew that she was safe here. With Mako holding one hand and Ryuko holding the other, Satsuki let the water of the bath, as well as the water of her tears, work their healing on her body and soul.

Wednesday

Much of Satsuki's following day was spent in a haze. Her sleep had been interrupted several times by the need to get up and use the bathroom, as Mako had insisted that she drink plenty of liquids after the massage and bath in an effort to flush the toxins from her blood. Between those interruptions, however, she had slept like a brick, remembering none of her dreams at all.

Luckily, she was able to spend the entire day in her office, having no off-site meetings or functions requiring her attendance. There were a couple of video conference calls to be dealt with, but those could be handled from her desk.

Between calls, reading reports and fielding email questions from staff, she would get up and pace the office, doing various stretches to try to keep her arms and back loose. The massage had left her sore, no question, but she was amazed at the effect it had on her range of motion. She had been carrying far more tension than she had known, no doubt about it.

About halfway through the second of her conference calls, she suddenly realized that without any conscious decision to do so, she had crossed her arms, snaked both hands under her blouse and was once again engaging in a self-hug by gently cupping her own breasts. Luckily, the video feed only showed her from the neck up, so she wasn't broadcasting her groping to the Board of Directors, but she could not help but smile at the idea that she was doing something secret and comforting for herself right under their noses.

From there it was home, bath, dinner, and a return to the couch for the evening's movie, which was to be a repeat of the previous night's selection since none of the three had retained more than a few frames of it.

This time around, they watched maybe the first half hour in relative silence. Throughout, Mako would cast repeated looks of mild concern in Satsuki's direction, and appeared very much like she wanted to say something, but kept stopping herself. For her part, Ryuko watched the movie with eyes halfway closed, looking rather drained from her day at school.

“Mako?” Satsuki asked at last.

“Um, yes, Satsuki-sama?”

“About what happened last night...”

Mako's face showed a flicker of panic. “Are you sure you're okay, Satsuki-sama? I really should have been more careful...”

“No, I'm fine,” Satsuki assured her. “Obviously there was something that needed to get out. I was just wondering, though: is it going to be like that every time?”

“Shouldn't be,” Ryuko answered before Mako could speak. “At least, it wasn't for me. After the first big unclench, every backrub felt better and better.”

“There'll still be knots to work through,” Mako continued, “but I really think we got the worst of the bad stuff last night.”

“I see,” Satsuki nodded. “Then... Mako, would you please do me the kindness of continuing where you left off?”

After a moment of surprise, Mako's face lit up. “Of course, Satsuki-sama! I'd be happy to! Honestly, I thought you might never want me to touch you ever again after last night!”

“You did far more good than harm,” Satsuki smiled. She then took the same throw pillow that she had used the night before, and once again settled to her knees in front of Mako, positioned with her back to the sofa.

She was not wearing her usual robe tonight, as it had gone to the cleaners after getting drenched on the bathroom floor the previous night, so she had opted for simple flannel pyjamas. After a moment's pause in which she weighed a flicker of unease against the thought of having those magical hands doing their work unobstructed, she unbuttoned the pyjama top and slipped it off, then crossed her arms and again took her breasts in her hands.

Mako immediately went back to work, though Satsuki noticed a marked difference in her technique tonight. Instead of digging deeply with her fingertips and thumbs, she was doing most of the work with the heels of her hands, smoothing out the tension with gentle, firm pressure. There were a few winces as she caught particularly sore areas, but the warmth left behind was more than worth the tiny flashes of pain.

After working on her upper back for a blissful twenty minutes or more, Mako politely asked Satsuki to scoot forward a little, then knelt behind her to get a better angle on her lumbar region. This ended up being yet another form of agony mixed with relief, and Satsuki quickly realized that she needed a better chair for her office.

“Ryuko, never let this girl get away,” Satsuki said between moans. “She's a gift from the gods.”

“Satsuki-sama is too kind,” Mako said shyly.

“Don't worry, I know she's a keeper,” Ryuko chuckled. “But that doesn't mean I'm not willing to share her with my nee-chan when needed.”

“Satsuki-sama, I'm pretty much done with your back, but if you'd like, there are some other places I can work on while we're sitting here.”

“If I'd like?” Satsuki sighed. “I'm melting here, and she's asking if I'd like more? I'm serious, Ryuko, hold onto this one.”

“Does that mean yes?” Mako asked cheerfully.

“It means yes,” Satsuki smiled. “Thank you, Mako.”

After giving Satsuki a few nudges to get her to sit up straighter, Mako reached around with her right hand and laid it flat just over the older girl's navel. “Are you ticklish, Satsuki-

sama?”

Satsuki felt herself tense a little at this unexpected touch: for some reason, it was a little less comfortable being reached around in this way. “I don't... think so?” she said doubtfully.

“Okay,” Mako nodded against her shoulder. “This is a little tricky, since there's no bones to work against, so it kind of takes a different touch. Let me know if it tickles.”

Mako began to press down very slightly, then moved her hand in a small, slow clockwise circle, which widened with each rotation. At the final sweep, Mako's hand brushed against Satsuki's on the upswing, then all the way to the waistband of her pyjama pants on the way down. Here, Satsuki felt herself shiver slightly. That was the closest anyone's hand had come since...

“I'm sorry, Satsuki-sama, did it tickle?” Mako asked.

“A little...” Satsuki whispered in reply, preferring that explanation to the alternative.

“Sorry about that,” Mako smiled. “You don't want to press too hard and squish against your insides, but doing it too lightly can make it tickle. I'll try something else.”

“Something else” ended up being the nape of Satsuki's neck, loosening the smaller muscles near where skull met spine, and then Mako spread the fingers of both hands through Satsuki's thick hair and started rubbing her scalp with her fingertips. It was at this moment that Satsuki realized that she was as good as gone, and she wondered how she had lived her nineteen years without someone doing this for her every single day.

From the scalp Mako went on to briefly run her fingers over Satsuki's forehead, briefly rubbing two fingertips over the perpetual frown-lines between her eyebrows. Then it was soft, firm circles of motion over the temples and down the cheeks and along the sides of the neck. Satsuki felt Mako rise up a bit then to better reach over her, and she began to once again knead the inner parts of the shoulders, eventually dropping her fingers down to smooth out the area just beneath the collarbones, directly above Satsuki's breasts. Next came the outer parts of the shoulders, and then a series of gentle squeezes and kneads along the upper arms, down to the lower arms, until at last Mako's hands came to rest just over Satsuki's.

Then, apart from the long-forgotten movie, all was silent for a while, until Mako whispered something close to her ear. “Satsuki-sama... may I touch you?”

The question caught Satsuki off-guard, and she was suddenly aware of how close they were: Mako was very much embracing her from behind at this point. “What do you mean?”

“What I mean is...” Mako began, then stopped and giggled shyly before going on. “Um... may I touch your breasts, Satsuki-sama?” She gently squeezed Satsuki's hands for emphasis.

Satsuki was beginning to hear a dull roaring sound, which she realized was the rushing of her own blood through her ears. “Is this... part of the massage?”

“Not at all, silly,” Mako chuckled. “There's no muscle there. I'd just... really like to touch you, Satsuki-sama. But only if you want to.”

“But... Ryuko..!” Satsuki whispered, feeling a sudden rising panic as she looked over her shoulder.

To her shock, Ryuko was looking back at her with a soft half-smile. “I got no problem with it,” she shrugged slightly.

“But..!”

“Ryuko-chan and I talked about this earlier,” Mako went on. “She said it was okay if it was you, Satsuki-sama.”

Just like that, between the extensive massage, the unexpected request, and the even more unexpected agreement from Ryuko, the evening had become something completely surreal. “But... why would you want to..?” Satsuki asked in a whisper.

“Well... I kinda love boobs,” Mako giggled. “I love everything about them. I'd play with Ryuko-chan's all day if she'd let me.”

“She would, too,” Ryuko agreed.

“But this isn't about me,” Mako went on. “I'd love to touch you, Satsuki-sama, but only if you want to be touched. That's the important part. So... may I?”

Thoughts whirled in Satsuki's head, and she could not deny that there was a part of her screaming that she should run away from this before someone else overpowered her and took advantage of her. Mako just wanted to use her and take something from her, just like everyone else. Just like... her. She couldn't trust Mako with this.

Then, however, she realized how much she had already trusted Mako. From the waist up, her breasts were the only parts of Satsuki that those hands had NOT touched. Mako had treated her body with respect, with care, and with the most delicate of attention, and had done so much for her already in these past few days.

Had she done all of that for Satsuki's sake, though, or for her own wants?

“You don't have to, Satsuki-sama,” Mako whispered then. “I won't ask again if you don't want me to.”

Those words briefly chased the doubtful thoughts back into the shadows. Satsuki wanted so badly to believe Mako, and to trust her...

With slow, hesitant movements she lowered her hands to her lap. “Go... go ahead,” she whispered.

She held her breath for a moment, and then another pair of warm hands closed over her breasts, cradling them gently. Satsuki heard Mako take a deep breath and then let it out in a sigh. “Thank you, Satsuki-sama. Now... put your hands over mine.”

Satsuki again raised her hands and laid them over Mako's, and to her amazement, she realized what the younger girl was doing: she was giving control of the moment back to Satsuki.

“Satsuki-sama is letting me touch her,” Mako whispered in an amazed voice. “You're just like Ryuko-chan: so strong and still so soft.”

“Thank you,” Satsuki replied brokenly, her throat dry.

“Does Satsuki-sama like this?” Mako asked.

To her own surprise, Satsuki realized that she liked it very much. Over the last couple of days she had come to rather enjoy the feeling of her own hands on her breasts, and this did not feel THAT much different. Mako seemed content to simply hold them and gently squeeze them, much as Satsuki herself had done, so the only real difference was that it was someone else's hands.

Someone else's hands... along with the arms reaching around her, and the warm, soft body pressing against her bare back.

Someone else's hands...

“Mako,” she said quietly, “please stop.”

The hands immediately withdrew. “Are you okay, Satsuki-sama?”

“I'm fine, I'm fine,” she nodded. “That was... a little intense.” She opened her eyes to see Mako staring back at her, the younger girl's face filled with concern. Ryuko was leaning down from the couch, a matching look of worry on her face.

“Was it too much, Satsuki-sama?” Mako asked. “I'm sorry if I was pushy.”

“No, you were fine,” Satsuki almost laughed. “Honestly, Mako, you've been anything BUT pushy. I just don't know that I was ready for that. It's... a little uncomfortable for me to be held from behind, to be honest. I've spent so long watching my back that it's hard to relax when someone reaches around me from behind.”

“I'm sorry,” Mako said again.

“You were fine,” Satsuki insisted, groping on the floor for her pyjama top, then slipping her arms back into it. “I wish I could explain it better. It DID feel good to be held like that, but... there are still those other memories there as well. It's a jumble, and... I'm sorry.”

“You ain't the one who needs to apologize for that,” Ryuko said in a low voice, and when Satsuki looked up, she saw a distant fire in her sister's eyes. Ryuko knew.

“It means a lot to me that you're trying so hard for me, though,” Satsuki smiled hesitantly, still not certain how this could be happening. What had the conversation between the two of them been like to have led up to this, anyway?

“Does Satsuki-sama want us to keep trying?” Mako asked in a quiet voice.

Satsuki paused in buttoning up her pyjamas and thought about this. It would be easiest to say no, and let the two of them continue with their own happiness. It would be easiest to force these conflicting thoughts of potential pleasure and very real pain into the back of her mind and bury herself in her work. It would be easiest to go on believing that this was something that she could never have. Something that she did not deserve.

“Please do,” she heard herself say.

Thursday (part 1)

One might assume that a clothier, even one the size of REVOCS, would not require an extensive Security department. Given the previous management's questionable activities, dirty dealings and trivial matters such as world domination, however, Satsuki had inherited quite an extensive network, and fortunately, she had just the man to put in charge of whipping them into shape for the new regime.

Metaphorically speaking, that is: the actual whip had been retired with the loss of goku uniforms.

Every Thursday afternoon, Satsuki had a one-on-one meeting over tea with her new Security Chief. She always made sure to schedule the meetings to run long, because she truly enjoyed the luxury of spending actual social time with the man who had once been her impenetrable shield. They saw each other so infrequently now, and she wanted to be sure to have at least a little time to talk to him.

Looking quite dapper in his black suit, Ira Gamagori sat opposite Satsuki's desk, a teacup held carefully between two of his enormous fingers. He gave his weekly report with customary businesslike efficiency. All was going well enough on both a local and global scale, and efforts to find and purge operatives sympathetic to the cause of the life fibers had turned up nothing: apparently Ragyo had actually managed to keep such a massive conspiracy extremely limited to her inner circle, all of whom had been consumed by the alien monstrosity prior to the final battle.

All except one, and by Gamagori's report, there were no leads on the location of Rei Hououmaru either. Satsuki knew that she would not truly rest easily until she knew what had become of “Auntie Rei,” but until then, her fate remained an annoying loose end.

Once the business part of the meeting was concluded, Satsuki made a bit of small talk with her stone-faced shield before launching into more dangerous waters. “Ira, there is something I wish to discuss with you, but it involves very personal matters, both yours and my own. Before we begin, I must stress that you are not to consider yourself obligated to answer any of these if they make you uncomfortable. I am speaking to you as a friend, not as the head of this corporation.”

“You may ask me anything, Satsuki-sama,” Gamagori nodded crisply before taking a sip of his tea.

“Very well,” said Satsuki, leaning back in her chair. “Ira... you are what is colloquially known as a 'submissive,' correct?”

Gamagori made an obvious effort to avoid spitting out his tea, though he could not stop the small choking fit that followed. “My lady?” he gasped.

“If it is not too personal a subject, I would like your perspective regarding the draw of taking a submissive role in sexual activity. What is it that you enjoy about being dominated to the

point of masochism?"

"I... I am not certain I can express it properly," he stammered. "My lady, why do you wish to know?"

Satsuki frowned. "Because, meaning no offense to you or your own tendencies, I cannot see the appeal. What is it that excites you about being helpless, and putting someone else in complete control over you?"

Gamagori set down his tea and took a deep breath, making an obvious effort to contain his discomfort. "Speaking only for myself, Satsuki-sama, I have yet to reach a position in which I have felt truly helpless, or completely controlled. The ropes have not been constructed that can contain me if I do not wish to be contained. In that respect, there is a certain level of safety."

"Would you allow yourself to be made truly helpless in the name of sexual gratification?"

"I... do not believe that being truly helpless would be gratifying at all," he frowned. "It is difficult to explain, Satsuki-sama, but for you, I will try."

"Thank you, Ira," she smiled.

"There is a necessary level of trust, both spoken and unspoken, between a dominant and a submissive," he said with obvious difficulty, and Satsuki could not help but find his blush rather sweet. "It is a matter of engaging in a game, if you will, but there are safe words and other means of ending the game if it becomes too much for either party. I can say without boast that I am a very powerful man, and have been for as long as I remember." He chewed on his next words for a moment before expressing them. "There is a certain... thrill... to ceding that position of power to someone you can trust. For myself, the more control ceded, the more thrilling it becomes."

"Interesting," Satsuki considered. "So there is pleasure to be found in loss of control, but only if there is trust attached?"

"Indeed," Gamagori nodded. "To rob someone of control without their trust is little more than rape."

Satsuki flinched at the use of this term. "I see."

"If I may know," he said with a nervous frown, "why are you asking me this, Satsuki-sama? Do you find my tastes disturbing? I need no longer engage in such-"

"Do not finish that thought, Ira," Satsuki said in a firm voice. "As long as no one is hurt, what you choose to do in your bedroom is not for me to judge." She then smiled more widely. "Nor is whom you should choose to do it with."

"Of... of course, Satsuki-sama," he managed.

"Though I would be lying if I said that Nonon and I no longer speak of such private matters, Ira..."

He tightened his lips and closed his eyes. “Satsuki-sama, if it bothers you-”

She held up one hand to stop him. “Please, Ira, do not finish that thought either. While I am curious, as a friend, regarding your intentions for one another... I would never judge either one of you.”

Gamagori frowned more deeply, though this time in thought. “Our encounters thus far have been... mutually beneficial, I believe. We have not given much consideration to the future, however. Our arrangement may very well be temporary.”

“Then I find it fortunate that the two of you have reached a place of sufficient trust with one another, at least for now,” Satsuki assured him. I cannot say that I understand your methods, Ira, but I trust the both of you.”

He nodded slowly, then furrowed his brow. “In that case, Satsuki-sama, I am still curious. Why did you request my insight?”

Satsuki got up from her chair and went to stare through the glass walls behind her, overlooking the bay. “I am in a difficult place at present, Ira,” she said, crossing her arms over her chest. “The thought of losing even a shred of control has become a significant hurdle between myself and intimacy.” She took a deep breath, then looked over her shoulder at her shield. “You see, I HAVE been in the position of being dominated against my will by someone I should have been able to trust, but could not.”

With the noise of screaming seamwork, Gamagori rose from his chair, practically bursting out of his suit as his face took on a look of utter fury. “WHO DID THIS TO YOU, SATSUKI-SAMA?! I SHALL CRUSH THEM FOR-”

“Be at ease, Ira,” she said, again holding up one hand to stop him. “It is in the past.”

“How could I have allowed this to happen?!” he growled. “Do you require additional guard until I may find and punish the monster who dared lay a hand on you?”

“You know who the 'monster' was, Ira,” Satsuki said evenly. “She will trouble me no longer.”

The fury in his eyes slowly faded into understanding, and his frown deepened still further. “If I had known, my lady...”

“If you had known, my friend, would you have been able to stop yourself from attacking her?” Satsuki asked him. “Your anger has the destructive force of a tsunami, Ira. Had you known the extent to which my mother was continuously abusing and humiliating me, I feared that your loyalty to me would have outweighed your loyalty to our long-term goals. I apologize, Ira, but your devotion was the very reason I could not allow you to know.”

“I... failed you,” Gamagori said in a low voice.

“You did no such thing,” Satsuki assured him.

He looked doubtful for a moment, but then nodded. “If that is your belief, I will not dishonor you by denying it. I grieve for what has become of you, my lady. It horrifies me that you

must carry such memories."

"They served a purpose," Satsuki replied. "You see... every memory of her abominable actions became a weapon to one day use against her. Rather than suppress the images, I burned them into my mind, so that when the time came, I would be true to my resolve and would carry through with the horrible necessity of killing my own mother. Now, however? I only wish I could allow myself to let them go, or at least replace them with new, better memories." She closed her eyes, and for a moment she vividly remembered the feeling of warm hands covering her breasts, and an awed voice whispering in her ear.

Mako had felt HONORED to touch her.

"Is it worth it, Ira?" she asked.

"My lady?"

"Is it worth it to trust someone enough to let go?"

Gamagori cleared his throat. "I cannot pretend to understand what you have suffered, my lady – my games are trivial by comparison – but in my experience... Yes, if you can find such trust, it is well worth it."

"Thank you, Ira," she smiled. "I hope you are right."

Thursday (part 2)

Satsuki barely noticed the selection for Thursday evening's movie: she had a feeling it would end up being nothing more than background noise anyhow.

They began with Satsuki once again kneeling on the floor in front of Mako for a brief “touch-up” backrub. True to Ryuko's statement the night before, this one was much further to the left on the sliding scale of pleasure versus pain, and Satsuki found it all too easy to melt a little into Mako's dexterous touch.

As they neared the end of the massage, though, Satsuki wondered if it would lead in the same direction as the night before. While she had no difficulty in once again removing her pyjama shirt for the massage, she was not certain yet how she would react if Mako once again asked for a more intimate form of touch.

In the end, though, it came as no surprise that Mako veered off onto a different road. “Satsuki-sama, I've been thinking about what you said last night, about how uncomfortable it feels for you to be held from behind. Do you have any problems being the one doing the holding, though?”

Satsuki thought about this for a moment. “I... I'm not sure if I would or not. I have not had much... opportunity, to be honest.”

“For some reason I thought Jakuzure would have been all about the cuddling,” Ryuko added, though she seemed more serious than sarcastic.

“Nonon knew better than to get too close,” Satsuki frowned. Saying it that way, she wondered if perhaps Nonon had at any point wanted to hold more than her hand. Apart from Iori, Nonon was Satsuki's oldest friend, and there had certainly been times when her affections had felt more than merely friendly.

“Do you want to try it out, Satsuki-sama?” Mako asked. “I can be your test subject - I love being held!”

Satsuki turned and gave Mako a bemused look over her shoulder. “How should we... do this?”

Mako all but bounced in place. “Well, sit back up on the couch, scoot way back and, um, spread your legs apart a little, and I'll sit in front of you and lean back on you, and you can hold me while we watch the movie.”

“I think I can do that,” Satsuki nodded. “Um, should I put my shirt back on?”

“Up to you, Satsuki-sama,” Mako waved. “Whatever you're comfortable with.”

Satsuki had a sudden vivid flash of how it might feel to have Mako leaning back against her bare breasts, but quickly realized that this might yet be a bit much, so she retrieved her

pyjama shirt from nearby and slipped it back on. “I think with the shirt on, then, if that's okay.”

“Absolutely okay,” Mako smiled. “This is about you, Satsuki-sama.”

She did up about half the buttons, and then, deciding that this would be enough, Satsuki once again took her normal seat to the far right of the sofa, scooting as far back into the cushions as she could, partially wedging herself in the corner. She then parted her legs a bit so that Mako would have room to sit in front of her, and no sooner had she done so than the former no-star took her place there.

“I'm going to lean back now, Satsuki-sama, if that's okay,” Mako smiled over her shoulder.

“Go ahead,” Satsuki nodded.

Mako eased herself back against Satsuki, sighing as her head came to rest upon one of the taller girl's shoulders. “Is this still comfy?” she asked in a soft voice.

“It is,” Satsuki replied, finding that she rather enjoyed the feeling of the other girl leaning against her.

“You can put your arms around me if you'd like,” Mako giggled.

“Oh! Um... would that be alright with you, Mako?”

“Of course,” Mako laughed. “I volunteered, didn't I? Satsuki-sama can hold me however she wishes.”

Gingerly, Satsuki reached around Mako with both arms, but hesitated before putting her hands down. Where was a proper place for them to go? She didn't want to go too low or too high, so probably the waist, but Mako was also wearing two-piece pyjamas, and the top had ridden up a bit, leaving a wide strip of bare skin, including her navel.

After leaving her hands hovering for a few seconds, Mako giggled again, then used her own hands to guide Satsuki's to rest over her bare midriff. Mako's skin was very warm and soft, and Satsuki had to fight against the reflex to inhale sharply in surprise.

“There,” Ryuko grinned from the other end of the couch. “Wasn't so hard, was it?”

Mako nestled her head against Satsuki's shoulder. “Snuggly,” she sighed contentedly. “What do you think, Satsuki-sama?”

“It's... nice,” Satsuki admitted. Mako fit against her quite nicely, and their shared warmth was actually very comforting. For once, her arms were not looking to break, to grapple, or to disarm: they were content simply to hold.

After that, no words were spoken for quite a while, and the three girls went on watching the movie. Only Ryuko seemed to be paying it much attention, however: Mako was drowsing a little in Satsuki's arms, and Satsuki herself was more focused on the unfamiliar but very welcome feelings.

She could definitely get used to this.

It occurred to her that Mako's first suggestion, back when all of this had started, had in a way been preparing Satsuki for this: learning how to hold herself was just a step away from being able to hold someone else. It was a little different, of course, but with Mako being another woman, it was still familiar enough to make the necessary connection.

Mako shifted against her a tiny amount, and made a small humming sound in her throat. She seemed pretty content with this as well, and Satsuki found herself smiling at the thought. After everything Mako had done for her, it felt good to be able to pay her back a little.

“Satsuki-sama?” Mako said softly.

“What is it?” Satsuki murmured.

“Um... I need to ask you a favor, please.”

“Mako?” Satsuki asked. She looked over at Ryuko, and saw that her sister was watching the two of them with arched eyebrows.

“Satsuki-sama, I'm just not sure how much of this was intentional, and I don't want you to get scared or feel bad if it wasn't.”

“Mako, what do you mean?” Satsuki asked, getting a bit concerned now.

Mako turned her face awkwardly to smile up at her. “You don't have to move them,” she said carefully, “but... your hands..?”

Confusion reigned for a moment more, and then Satsuki felt her heart drop down in her chest as she realized what had happened. Completely unconsciously, Satsuki had let her hands drift up into Mako's pyjama top, and they were now gently cupping the other girl's breasts, in just the same comforting way that she had been holding her own for the past few days.

She was fondling Mako without her permission.

She was a monster. Just like her mother.

Satsuki jerked her hands away. “Mako, I'm so sorry,” she whispered, panic rising within her. How could she have let this happen?

“Why are you sorry?” Mako asked, half turning against her to look intently into her eyes.

“I... shouldn't have...” she managed, tears springing to her eyes. Was this the price of sharing her mother's bloodline?

Mako shook her head. “I don't mind, Satsuki-sama.”

“But I didn't ask you...”

“You didn't need to, Satsuki-sama. I already gave you permission, remember?”

Satsuki's eyes went wide. “What?”

“I said that Satsuki-sama can hold me however she wishes,” Mako said with a lopsided smile. “That was your permission.”

“I know what you're thinking, nee-san,” Ryuko said softly, scooting closer to the two of them, “and it's not true. You're not her.”

“You're safe here, Satsuki-sama,” Mako insisted. “Safe to try all the things you never thought you could have.”

Satsuki looked from one of them to the other, wondering if they knew just how on-target those words were. “I... I don't want to become her,” she whispered.

“We won't let you,” Ryuko said in a quiet yet fierce tone.

“I promise, it's okay,” Mako insisted, still giving Satsuki a warm, sweet smile. “I liked it, Satsuki-sama. I was... even kind of hoping you might do something like that eventually, but I didn't think it would be this soon. Did you like how it felt?”

“It felt... natural,” Satsuki said, trying to make sense of it. “I can't even say if I liked it or not, because I just did it without thinking.”

Mako smiled more widely, then shifted so that she was once again sitting with her back against Satsuki's chest. “Then maybe you should try it again WITH thinking and find out.” She guided Satsuki's hands to once again rest on her bare midriff, then gently patted them. “Do whatever feels good, Satsuki-sama. You have my permission.”

“But...” Satsuki looked over at Ryuko, who had remained close by. “How can you possibly be okay with me pawing your girlfriend right in front of you?” she asked in an exasperated voice.

“That's a complicated answer,” Ryuko chuckled, and then her smile widened evilly. “Though keep in mind that I still get her after you're done, so there's that.”

“You don't have to do anything you don't want to, Satsuki-sama,” Mako reminded her. “We can just go back to watching the movie and enjoying the cuddle. You still have my permission if you want to do more, though.”

From there they settled into an awkward silence, or at least it was awkward from Satsuki's perspective. Mako had once again relaxed into her arms, and this time even Ryuko had stayed close, leaning in shoulder-to-shoulder with her sister and idly stroking Mako's hand.

Satsuki was finding herself completely incapable of rational thought, and instead concentrated solely on the position of her hands. She could just leave them there and nothing more would need to happen. They could finish the movie, say goodnight, and go to bed.

But Mako had given her permission.

Rational thought made a quick recovery, trying to clamp down on these feelings. They were just breasts, for heaven's sake. Just modified sweat glands intended for feeding mammalian young. Why all the fuss and bother over something that everyone in the room already had? The sexualization of the mammary glands was another corruption from the Western world, and nothing more.

But Mako had given her permission, and that made all the difference. It wasn't just skinship, or girls being girls: it was an invitation, freely given, to a form of intimacy that Satsuki had never experienced, except for the parody forced upon her by her mother. It was not something to be dreaded, but enjoyed, and perhaps even desired.

Satsuki realized that she wanted nothing more in the world at that moment than to accept that invitation and see where it led her.

“Mako,” she whispered brokenly. “Um... may... may I?”

“You absolutely may,” Mako whispered in reply, smiling radiantly.

Breath ragged and pulse deafening in her ears, Satsuki swallowed hard and steeled herself to continue. Inch by painstaking inch, she slid her hands upward along Mako's warm skin, feeling first the lines of her lowest ribs, and then the gentle swell of her breasts. Mako took a deep breath, causing her to move beneath Satsuki's touch, then sighed happily. “Satsuki-sama is touching me,” she said dreamily.

Only because you're letting me,” Satsuki said in a rough voice.

“Of course I am,” Mako giggled. “I trust you, Satsuki-sama.”

“I wish I knew why.”

“Because I know you'd stop if I asked you to,” Mako said patiently. “Just like you asked me to stop last night. You trusted me, and I can trust you, because you're you and not her.”

Satsuki suddenly remembered what Gamagori had said earlier that day about safe words, and about the necessary trust between a dominant and a submissive. That seemed to apply here as well, though for the life of her Satsuki would not know which of them could possibly be considered the dominant partner. Yes, Satsuki was the one doing the actual touching, but Mako certainly seemed to be the one taking the lead.

“Go ahead and play a little, if you want,” Mako grinned. “Get a good feel.”

Nodding silently against Mako's shoulder, Satsuki did just that, using her hands to better acquaint herself. Mako's breasts were probably about as large as her own, though perhaps not as firm: unsurprising, given her diet, not to mention how rarely she used to wear a bra. Even then, there was a softness to them that Satsuki found nothing short of inviting. She remembered how Mako had said she would play with Ryuko's all day if allowed, and Satsuki found herself beginning to agree. Was it the warm skin that she could practically sink her fingers into, though, or was it the simple fact that she had been given leave to do so? Either way, it was quickly becoming intoxicating.

As the movie continued unheeded, Satsuki held them, caressed them, felt their weight and fullness, traced her fingers around their undersides, felt the nipples poking against her palms...

Here, Mako made an odd little noise and inhaled quickly. “Are you okay?” Satsuki asked, immediately stilling her hands.

“Better than okay,” Mako nodded against her. “You don't have to stop.”

Satsuki slowly resumed her hands' motions, cupping and squeezing, and in the process she quite accidentally pinched one of Mako's nipples between thumb and forefinger. Again, Mako made a noise that was part whimper and part moan, and for a moment Satsuki held her breath as she realized what this sound was.

Carefully, now, Satsuki used just the tips of her forefingers to gently brush against Mako's nipples, and was quietly amazed at how they felt under her touch. This was certainly unlike anything she had experienced while touching her own, and while intellectually she knew that this stiffness meant arousal, she was still utterly amazed to be actually feeling it, and to know that she had caused it. “Mako,” she whispered, gently tracing her fingertips in slow circles around the erect nipples.

“That means I like it, Satsuki-sama,” Mako said in a voice that was part giggle, part gasp.

Again, Satsuki's intellect tried to barge in and remind her of clusters of nerve endings and evolutionary conditioning to make the feeding of young a pleasant experience, but none of that mental chatter could chase away the incredible realization that Mako was aroused because of HER, and Mako was making those wonderful little noises because of HER.

“Are you... sensitive here?” Satsuki asked.

“Very,” Mako nodded.

“I'll say,” Ryuko agreed. “Some nights that's almost all it takes.”

The sound of her sister's voice once again came as a shock, but less so this time. In a way, it felt like Ryuko was part of this intimate moment as well.

“Satsuki-sama, may I have one of your hands?” Mako asked in a breathy voice. “I'd like to show you something, if you'll allow it.”

“Of course,” Satsuki replied, slipping her right hand out from under Mako's pyjama top, while the left continued absently stroking her breasts.

Mako took the offered hand in both of hers, then brought it to her lips and gently kissed the tip of each finger. Then, to Satsuki's mounting surprise, Mako guided the hand down beneath her pyjama pants, beneath her panties, and into the tuft of coarse hair beneath.

What Satuski felt next was something she recognized intellectually: she had studied anatomy and read books about reproduction and sexuality, after all. She knew all the terminology, and could even picture the labeled diagrams in her head.

None of that, however, could have prepared her for the warm slickness that her fingers had discovered, and for all her knowledge, she could only bring herself to say one thing: “Mako... You're... you're wet...”

“That also means I like it, Satsuki-sama,” Mako whispered.

Throughout her adolescence and now adulthood, Satsuki had steadfastly refused to engage in acts of self-pleasure, mostly because of Ragyo, but also partially because of the inescapable feeling that to indulge would be to admit weakness. Thus, even though she knew what a clitoris was, she had never felt one beneath her fingers like this.

She was absolutely fascinated, and she began running the length of her index finger back and forth along the erect nub, coating it in Mako's juices. As she traced her way down, she realized that with one little bend of the finger she could be inside Mako, but she did not dare take that liberty. With each repetition, Mako began to moan, first little bursts of humming in her throat, then longer voiced gasps with her eyes closed and her mouth wide open. She began to gently rock her hips in time with Satsuki's motions, and the older girl found herself amazed at the way Mako responded to her touch. Once again, she realized that she was the one causing this: she was the reason Mako was making these sounds of pure pleasure.

But then another realization hit, this one much harder. Was she having sex with Mako right in front of her girlfriend – Satsuki's own sister, no less? Had this gone from affection and intimacy to outright sex? Where was the line drawn when it was two girls?

She had no idea what the answer was, and so she slowly and even reluctantly slipped her hand out from Mako's panties. “I'm sorry, Mako,” she whispered. “I can't... do that any more. It's too much right now.”

Mako let out a slow breath. “It's okay, Satsuki-sama,” she whispered. “I'm sorry if I pushed you too much.”

“You didn't,” Satsuki assured her. “It's just... I don't want to take things too far. I don't want to hurt the two of you.”

“You had permission,” Ryuko reminded her.

“Hers, yes,” Satsuki nodded, looking over at her sister. “But your feelings are just as important to me, imouto.”

Ryuko rolled her eyes. “That's what I've been trying to tell you, nee-chan. If you have her permission, you have mine.” She then smirked. “Though I guess it's just as well you stopped there. Mako, if I'd had to hear you make those cute little orgasmic noises for a minute or two more, I might've had to either drag you back to our room or finish you off right here on this couch.”

“Ryuko-chan,” Mako giggled.

Satsuki again swallowed hard as she realized what Ryuko was saying. Again, she knew with her intellect that the two of them were lovers, but now that she had been given a taste of what

that was like, she was beginning to realize the true depth behind such a simple word as that.

“Maybe you should, then,” she said to Ryuko.

Her sister gave her a look of surprise, then shook her head. “Nah, we can wait until the movie's over. You two are all cozy right now: no sense in interrupting that.”

“I didn't mean going back to your room,” Satsuki said slowly.

There was a pause, and then Ryuko's eyes again went wide. “What, now? Here?”

“Satsuki-sama,” Mako whispered, a note of astonishment in her voice.

Satsuki tightened her arms around Mako, only then realizing that she still had one hand over the girl's breast. “If you would do me the honor of sharing that private moment with me, that is.”

Ryuko stared at Satsuki open-mouthed for a moment, and then slowly smiled. “If you say so, nee-chan.”

Before anyone else could so much as blink, Ryuko got down from the couch, knelt in front of the cuddled pair, then hooked her fingers around the waistband of Mako's pyjama pants and pulled both these and her panties to her ankles with a single swish of her arms. Satsuki gasped as Ryuko then parted Mako's legs and began kissing the girl's thighs. She had assumed that they would do whatever they were going to do on the sofa, but Ryuko obviously had other ideas.

In the end, Satsuki couldn't really see what Ryuko was doing, as her messy black hair obscured the view, but she could make an educated guess that it involved lips and tongues. Whatever it was, it was making Mako squirm against her. Not knowing what else to do, Satsuki simply held her as she writhed in the taller girl's arms.

“Satsuki-sama?” Mako said in a high-pitched squeal.

“Mako?” Satsuki asked, wondering what was possessing the girl to call HER name at a time like this.

“Touch me... please?” the younger girl panted.

Acting rather than thinking, Satsuki tried again to put her hands up Mako's pyjama shirt, but the other girl's movements were making it difficult. Taking a cue from Ryuko, Satsuki grabbed the hem of the shirt and pulled upward, and Mako squirmed in her lap to help get it off of her. Free of hindrance, now, Satsuki looked over Mako's shoulder at her now bared breasts, for the first time seeing what she had been touching moments ago.

For a moment, she hesitated. Should she squeeze? Pinch? Rather than that, she instead lightly ran her fingers over the taut nipples, and Mako gasped in response. Feeling the need to do more, though, Satsuki leaned in and kissed Mako on the neck, right where it met her shoulder. Her lips felt dry, so she quickly wet them with her tongue and continued kissing, leaving a trail along the side of her neck as her fingers continued caressing Mako's breasts.

“Ryuko-chan..!” Mako gasped. “Satsuki-sama..! Ryuko-chan! RYU – KO – CHA – N – NNNN!”

Mako arched her back and shuddered violently, making Satsuki instinctively tighten her arms around her again, and she held Mako while the younger girl rocked with the force of her climax.

Gradually, Mako again settled against her, her breath still coming in ragged gasps. From her place on the floor, Ryuko slid upward to kiss Mako deeply on the lips, and then slipped her arms around them both, so that Mako was held snugly between the two sisters.

Satsuki's mind reeled at the scene she had just witnessed. No, not merely witnessed: she had participated. She had asked if they would share this private moment with her, and they had answered with this, which was more than Satsuki could ever have dreamed possible.

She knew that there would be questions, mostly within the interior of her own head, but those could wait. Right now, she wanted nothing more than to enjoy what was in her arms.

Thursday (part 3)

Later that night, Satsuki lay awake in bed with her eyes wide open and her head filled with noise. It came as no surprise that sleep was eluding her, given the way that the evening had ended.

Ryuko and Mako had offered to let them spend the night in their bed ("You can be the big spoon!" Mako grinned), but Satsuki had begged off, saying that she had intruded on their privacy enough for one night, and that she had some things she needed to think about on her own. Mako had been visibly disappointed, but only for a moment, after which she smiled and said that she did not wish to push Satsuki any more than she already had.

Now, lying here wide awake and very much alone, Satsuki found a part of her wishing that Mako had pushed a little more after all. She was certainly grateful that the younger girl was being cautious and gentle with her feelings, but at the same time she could not deny that there had been something almost thrilling when Mako had taken the lead.

Mako had not only allowed Satsuki to lay hands on her, but had even encouraged it, to the point of guiding one of those hands to...

Even in the midst of being pleasured by Ryuko, Mako had asked- begged, really- for Satsuki's hands as well...

Satsuki closed her eyes and took a deep breath through her nose. She could still detect the faintest trace of that very unique, very private scent: the mixture of sweat and arousal and sex. She brought her hand to her face, then, and even though her fingers were long since dry, she could still smell where she had touched that warm slickness.

Mako had wanted her. Even as devoted to Ryuko as she was, Mako had wanted Satsuki, as well. This smell was proof of that: Mako had been aroused by her touch, to the point of wanting more.

To the point of GIVING more.

That was what it really came down to: Mako had taken the lead, perhaps, but in so doing had freely given control of herself to both of the sisters. She had left herself naked and vulnerable, pinned between the two of them, completely at their mercy. She had trusted them, and she had been rewarded with body-wracking ecstasy, calling out their names in a voice that had already burned itself into Satsuki's memory.

Satsuki wanted to hear those cries of passion again, but with her own voice.

What would it take for Satsuki to give herself so freely as that? Could she let anyone do that to her? Even Mako?

Feeling restless, Satsuki threw back the sheets, got out of bed and paced the room for a moment, eventually coming to a stop in front of a full-length looking glass. She stared into

her own eyes through the dimness, hoping that maybe her reflection might have some ideas.

When no answer was forthcoming, Satsuki looked herself up and down, then without really knowing why, she began unbuttoning her pyjama top, then slipped it over her shoulders and let it fall to the floor. She then slid down her pyjama pants and kicked them off, followed soon after by her panties, leaving her standing naked with herself.

She was distantly aware that she had a beautiful body by most standards. She was quite tall for a woman, with long, sleek, unmistakably powerful legs, yet with very feminine curves around the hips and waist, not to mention “an ass to die for” as she had once overheard Inumuta describe it. Even in the dim light of the room she could see the faint shadows outlining her abdominal muscles: nothing as prominent as Sanageyama or certainly Gamagori, but enough to give evidence to her strength and self-discipline. She knew that her breasts, large and firm and well-formed, were equally capable of inspiring lust as well as envy, the latter of which Nonon had not let her forget since shortly after puberty. Her shoulders and arms, like her legs, were sleek and powerful, her neck was long, yet graceful, and her face...

Truth be told, she had never paid much attention to her face. She knew that she had unusually thick eyebrows, but these had never bothered her, and in fact seemed to have been incredibly useful in helping her keep up her stern countenance as the ruler of Honnouji. It was a face seemingly built for scowling: would she or anyone else ever see it range from struggle and strain to blissful peace as Mako's had done hours ago?

Would she ever be able to give this body so freely to another, when she had only been taken from all her life?

She stared into her own eyes for a long time, then let her gaze drop slightly. To her partial surprise, she had once again crossed her arms over her chest and taken her breasts in her hands, as she had done many times since Monday night at Mako's suggestion. This was the first time, though, that she had done so in front of any sort of reflective surface, and as she looked at herself, she realized even more the truth of Mako's words: she really was giving herself a hug. On the surface, it seemed like a protective gesture, closing herself off from the world outside, but at the same time, she also knew that along with protecting herself, she was also reclaiming herself. She was giving herself over to hands that she knew she could trust, just as Mako had been trying to tell her.

She was giving her body freely... to herself.

Something snapped in Satsuki's mind, and she suddenly knew exactly how to get what she wanted. Rather than admitting weakness, it would be a show of strength. Rather than losing something, she would be gaining it, and more importantly she would be taking it for herself.

The thought of doing it in front of the mirror caused a rush of genuine embarrassment, though, so she hurried back to the bed, lay down on her back (though propped up slightly against her pillows), and pulled only the top-sheet over herself, leaving the duvet piled around her feet.

Where to start, though?

With Mako earlier, the arousal had started with touching her breasts. Would it be as easy as that, though? Satsuki had been touching them on and off for days now without even a hint of eroticism. That had been a different thing, though: with herself it had been for comfort, while for Mako it had been for stimulation.

But no, it hadn't been for that either, at least at first. Satsuki had merely been holding Mako at first, and yet the younger girl's nipples had quickly indicated just how much she was enjoying it. Was it better with someone else's hands, then? Was it the anticipation as well as the touch?

Satsuki realized that she was over-thinking, and tried to chase those thoughts away as she again brought her hands to her breasts, this time tracing lightly with her fingertips, working her way in slow circles toward the nipples before brushing against them gently. She felt a jolt of something, though whether it was just a reflex response or something more, she could not be sure. She repeated the action, and felt something of a faint internal flinch, but nothing more. Her nipples stayed relatively flat against her skin.

What if these were Mako's hands, she found herself wondering. Mako had touched her breasts once before, but only for the briefest of moments that Satsuki could barely remember now, only a day later, and at the time it had been more than she could allow herself to feel. Should she have let Mako continue? Should she have let go then and there? If so, then how?

At the same moment, her sense of honor reminded her that she was now pointedly fantasizing about her sister's girlfriend, and this would never do.

But Mako had been giving her permission all along, allowing Satsuki to do as she wished at her own pace, and Ryuko had not merely tolerated it, but encouraged it. How was this even possible?

Frustrated now, Satsuki gathered up her right breast with her left hand and mashed it as far upward as she could, so that she could try to take the nipple in her own mouth. Once her lips closed over it, she ran her tongue over the sensitive flesh and sucked awkwardly at it, desperately hoping for any sort of reaction. This, finally, made the nipple harden, so she repeated the process on her other breast, then returned to running her fingers over them both.

And now she was in the past, with Mako sitting against her, and they were no longer her own nipples she was touching, but Mako's, and this time she was free to let it excite her as well that she was having such an effect on a willing partner.

For a moment, she heard her honor screaming at her to stop thinking of her sister's lover in this base fashion, but she no longer cared about that voice. All she wanted was to feel Mako's skin again, and to hear those little gasps of pleasure.

She wondered if Mako might be wet already, so she let her right hand drift lower, hoping to test that with the very fingers that had touched her before.

Here, abruptly, her already fragile illusion shattered as the touch of her own fingers brought an unwelcome chill to her heart, along with the memory of a leering face.

In response, she found herself retreating back into intellect, trying to dispassionately observe what her fingers were feeling. She knew all the terminology from study, and she mentally recited the names as her fingers moved lower. The mons pubis... the ridiculously named cleft of Venus... the vulva...

This had been one of her ways of dealing with the abuse. By studying the female anatomy in books, she had discovered the names and functions for everything, and had endured the molestation by focusing only on the science of it, as though it were a physical examination.

This had sometimes almost worked.

She parted her legs slightly to give her hand better access. The labia majora... the labia minora... the clitoral hood... the urethra... the vaginal opening...

Another chill, stronger than the last, and with it a violent shiver. This wasn't working. Mindful of her intentions, even her own hands were too much.

Then, quite suddenly, she remembered a voice, as clearly as though it had been spoken again from just beside her:

Satsuki-sama can hold me however she wishes.

Mako had wanted her hands. Mako had trusted her hands.

Surely Satsuki could do the same?

She turned her attention back to her breasts, brushing the fingertips of her left hand against the softening nipples to regain their attention. To her relief, they immediately stiffened again at her touch, just as Mako's had.

That means I like it, Satsuki-sama.

The memory of that voice, and more importantly of the words spoken, began to chase away the cold within. Mako had wanted her. Mako had enjoyed her.

I'd like to show you something, if you'll allow it.

Then Mako had shown her in the most direct way possible how much Satsuki's touch had already aroused her. Now there was dampness under her fingers again, and a hint of that same smell of sweat and sex.

That also means I like it, Satsuki-sama.

Satsuki liked it too. The way Mako had moved with her, pressing into her fingers, the way Mako had shuddered and moaned against her, all of it, and Satsuki wanted it again. Satsuki wanted to hear that voice gasping her name again.

Now there was no place for intellect and labels. THIS was the part of her where the wetness was coming from, and THIS was the part of her that sent electric spasms shooting through her body as she ran her slickened fingers around it, and this was HER body, and these were

HER hands, and this was HER pleasure building up inside her like a tightening knot, and this was HER voice gasping and moaning.

Satsuki-sama? Touch me... please?

With that memory, Satsuki felt as though she would shake apart as the tension inside her broke in a flood of sensation and emotion. Her back arched, her arms and legs clenched, and she heard a ragged scream as her whole body seemed to spasm at once. There was a tiny spark of fear as she realized that she was losing herself completely, but then the wave crashed and she no longer cared. She embraced every indescribable moment of it. This was something she wanted and needed, and which she had finally taken for herself.

The surge receded, leaving her lying broken and numb on the bed, drenched in sweat and panting loudly. For a moment, she wondered if she would ever be able to move again.

Then there was a knock at the door, and a familiar voice calling her name. “Satsuki-sama? Are you okay?”

“Mako,” she whispered, fumbling for the sheet and pulling it up to cover herself, suddenly mindful of the unknowing role Mako had played in Satsuki's self-pleasuring.

The next voice was Ryuko's. “We're coming in,” her sister announced, then immediately opened the door and rushed inside, followed quickly by Mako. Ryuko was immediately scanning the area for an enemy, while Mako's focus was entirely on Satsuki.

“Are you okay, Satsuki-sama?” Mako asked, her face filled with concern.

“I'm...” Satsuki started, but she could not string two words together. She was suddenly aware of the fact that she was naked beneath the sheet, and she felt herself extremely vulnerable.

Mako looked at her for a moment, wrinkled her nose, and then her eyes went wide and she blushed furiously. “Oh! Um... Satsuki-sama was, um, doing THAT, then?”

“Doing what?” Ryuko asked, but then she took a long look at Satsuki herself, and her expression softened into a wry smile. “Oh, was that all it was? I thought someone was attacking you or something!”

“Sorry,” Satsuki whispered. “Was I... loud?”

Mako smiled, but she was still blushing. “You were... a little loud, yes.”

Ryuko chuckled, obviously amused by all of this. “Nee-san's a screamer. Who knew?”

“Are you okay, though, Satsuki-sama?” Mako asked her.

Normally, her pride would have taken over at this point and assured Mako that she was fine, but her pride was shattered by her own wants, so she gave them voice instead. “Would you... hold me for a moment, please?”

Mako immediately settled beside her on the bed and held her arms out. It was all Satsuki could do to sit up and collapse against her. She was shivering now, and her bare back suddenly felt very cold, but then Ryuko was scooting over to sit behind her and hug her from behind, sandwiching her between the two of them.

“I'm sorry for worrying you,” Satsuki whispered. “I... didn't know it would be so intense.”

“Satsuki-sama,” Mako asked carefully, “was that your first, um, orgasm?”

Satsuki nodded against Mako's shoulder. She could feel the sheet between them slipping slightly, and the touch of it was setting her nipples on fire. Every part of her had become hypersensitive in the wake of her climax.

“That's wonderful, Satsuki-sama,” Mako whispered into her ear. “Isn't it good to know that you can do something so loving for yourself?”

“It was... confusing,” Satsuki managed, “and honestly, a little scary.”

“Yeah, but it was still good, wasn't it?” Ryuko asked gently. “Feels weird saying this to my sister, given the circumstances, but I'm proud of you. You're taking control of your own body, like you should.”

“You've come a long way in a short time, Satsuki-sama,” Mako continued. “It makes sense that it was a little scary, but you did it anyway. This is what I've been trying to tell you since the beginning: once you trust your own hands, maybe you can learn to trust someone else's, if that's what you want.”

“It is,” Satsuki said huskily. “To trust your hands is something I want very much.” She then realized what she had let slip out, and took a sharp breath, ready to stammer out an apology.

Mako, however, merely broke slightly from their embrace and smiled at her through the darkness. “I'm honored, Satsuki-sama,” she whispered. “Just tell me when you're ready. We can go at your pace, however long it takes.”

“We can?” Satsuki said in a tiny voice, wondering how she could possibly mean it, and moreover, how Ryuko could possibly allow it.

“Mm hm,” Mako nodded, and then after giving Satsuki a momentary shy smile, she leaned in and kissed the older girl on the forehead. “Before that, though, we should probably get some sleep. Now, I know we asked this once already, but do you want to join us tonight?”

“Just to have company while you sleep, nee-san,” Ryuko added. “Besides, our bed doesn't have a big wet spot on it.”

Satsuki felt herself blush at her sister's words, but she managed a short chuckle. “Yes,” she said at last. “I think I'd like that.”

Friday (part 1)

Friday morning was largely a blur for Satsuki, with one meeting after another stretching from the opening of the business day to a delayed but welcome lunch alone in her office. She had been largely detached throughout, trusting her intellect to make the important decisions and negotiations while her emotions had taken up residence somewhere else entirely.

At least it was Friday. It had been a truly eventful week, even if most of the events of note had taken place at home rather than the office. Normally she would hope for a restful weekend away from REVOCs, but her home life was currently anything but restful.

What would Friday night bring, she wondered? What new attempt at intimacy might be in store for her, and would she be ready for it?

After lunch was her scheduled weekly meeting with her chief designer, but rather than the formality of sitting at her desk, Satsuki elected to see Iori at the tea table beside the windows. After observing the ceremony of their first cup together, Iori got down to business, telling her at great length about trends, changes in style, seasonal colors and most importantly the challenges of remaking their brand in the year since the fall of the life fibers.

She knew that she owed Iori a great deal in that regard especially. If not for his talented designs and his deft finger on the pulse of worldwide style, chances were that REVOCs would never have regained any level of public approval, even with the demonstrably short memories of the general populace.

She tried to give Iori her undivided attention, but even in his company she found her thoughts continuously drifting back to the events of the past eighteen hours, first on the couch, then in her own bed, and then the unique experience of waking up in the bed of her sister and Mako.

“I should have some demos ready soon,” Iori said in the distance, “and then it will be a matter of whether you and your sister approve of the designs before we move forward.”

Satsuki blinked at the mention of Ryuko. “I'm sorry, what do you need our approval for?”

Iori blinked at her, then gave her a soft, patient smile. “I was just talking about the clothing lines based on Senketsu and Junketsu,” he explained. “If I may say, Satsuki-sama, you're a thousand miles away today. Do you need to cut this meeting short? Everything else can wait.”

“I'm sorry, Iori,” she sighed, shaking her head and running her fingers back through her hair. “You're right, though: I'm certainly lacking focus today.”

“Is there anything I can help with?” Iori asked, raising his eyebrows.

For a while, Satsuki pondered this question. In a sense, it was good that it was Iori, who had known her longer than almost anyone, and had proven himself worthy of her trust year after year.

Still, this was not a matter to discuss with her blacksmith or her co-conspirator. This required something more personal. “Iori,” she said slowly, “do you... consider me a friend?”

The soft smile disappeared from the tailor's face. “Satsuki-sama?”

At the sound of the familiar honorific, Satsuki shook her head in mild frustration, though not with Iori himself. “We played with blocks together, Iori,” she said softly. “I know that you're technically my employee, but please, forget about that for the moment. I need to talk to the boy who's known me since we were in diapers together.”

“With all due respect, Satsuki-sama,” Iori replied, bowing his head slightly, “I was taught to be always aware of the disparity in our ranks, even as children together. I was the child of a family in service to your own. My duty has thus been always to you.”

“And did I ever take advantage of that, Iori? Did I ever treat you as a servant?”

“You were always... kind to me, in your own fashion,” Iori nodded, “though even then I understood why you sometimes had to keep your distance. I have always hoped to be worthy to be considered your friend.”

“But do you consider me YOUR friend?” Satsuki asked again. “Because right now, Iori, I need the counsel of a friend who will look me in the eye rather than observe tradition in this private setting. I have ALWAYS considered you worthy, Iori, but do you feel the same of me?”

At her words, he raised his eyes to meet hers, though his mouth was set into a hard line. “After all these years, you are far more important to me than that, Satsuki-sama,” he said quietly. “You are a great many things to me, but if I may be of service now as a friend, then it would be my honor.”

Satsuki closed her eyes, realizing that Iori was perhaps too traditional to give her a simple answer in this case. This would have to do. “Then I have a question for my friend Iori.”

“As you wish,” Iori nodded.

She took a long breath. “Do you think I'm beautiful?”

Iori's eyes went wide, and he fumbled for his tea. “Satsuki-sama, I...”

“Again, you have known me since we were toddlers,” Satsuki went on. “You have seen me at every age, and... you have seen me at my worst.” She brought her eyes to his once more. “You know what my mother did to me, Iori, and you and Nonon have kept my secrets faithfully these many years. That in mind, do you think I'm beautiful, or... when you look at me do you instead see a woman tainted by the unwanted touch of a monster? I beg you, Iori, answer me truthfully. I will think no less of you, whatever you say.”

Her tailor stared at her for a few moments, then bowed his head. “Pardon me, Satsuki-sama, but may I stand for a moment?”

“Of course,” she agreed.

Iori stood, then paced the area for a moment, obviously collecting his thoughts. It was an endearingly familiar gesture: while he always did his work sitting, he had always done his best thinking on his feet.

“From the day I learned of... your mother,” he said quietly, “I wished I could protect you from her. I wished I could hide you from her, or do something to stand against her and make her stop. When you took me into your confidence and made me the designer of your goku uniforms, I finally felt I had my chance, and with every uniform I sewed, I tried to think of it as coming one step closer to the day that she would never hurt you again. It was my driving force, Satsuki-sama, but not my only one.”

“Go on,” she nodded.

He made a dark face, then nodded to himself and once again took his seat. “I have been your personal tailor since we were eleven years old,” he said. “Every piece of clothing you wore from then to the fall of Honnouji was made by my hands, and this, as much as building the weapons for your uprising, gave me purpose. Please believe that I mean nothing untoward when I say this, but... for the past eight years, no one but you has known your body and its changes better than myself.”

Satsuki blinked a few times as she realized the truth in these words. For all her concern that she would never be able to trust her body to another, here was someone who had known every inch of her, out of necessity. Not once could she remember having been uncomfortable with Iori, his hands or his ever-present measuring tape, and not once could she remember him being anything but professional and courteous. Even as her body had developed into something to be wanted and desired, she had gone on trusting him with it, because he was Iori, and because she had always known that she could trust Iori. Why else would she have made him the linchpin of her plans to overthrow her mother?

“You see, Satsuki-sama,” he said with increasing difficulty, “I took my responsibility as your personal tailor as seriously as that of being your armorer. I wanted to make clothing to be admired, not for its own sake, but for how it complemented you. I wanted nothing more than for you to wear these things with confidence, and to recognize that you were worthy of only the best.” He closed his eyes. “So... yes, Satsuki-sama, I think you are very beautiful indeed, and I suppose I hoped somehow that I could make you clothing that would always remind you of the magnificence I have always seen in you.”

She stared at him, simply thunderstruck. After a long while, she set down her tea, reached forward, and warmly grasped the hands of her faithful friend. “Thank you, saihoshi-sama,” she whispered, bowing her head to him. “Your answer is more than I could have hoped for. Truly, I thank you.”

If Iori had more to say, it went unspoken, as there was a sudden buzzing from the intercom on Satsuki's desk, followed by Gamagori's voice. “Satsuki-sama, your sister is here to see you. Shall I send her to your- Matoi, what are you..?”

“Hey, nee-san!” Ryuko's voice came through the speaker. “Got a minute?”

Satsuki released Iori's hands and stepped over to her desk to push the transmit button on the intercom. “Hello, Ryuko. I was just finishing a meeting. What brings you here?” Ryuko almost never came here after school, and for her to be here without Mako seemed stranger still.

“Just needing a sisterly chat. You know, if you can fit me into your busy schedule?”

“You know where the express elevator is,” Satsuki said with a snort. “I'll see you in a few moments.”

The intercom cut out, and Satsuki looked up to see that Iori was standing opposite her desk. “Is there anything else I can do for you, Satsuki-sama?”

“Not for me, no,” she smiled. “We should... have lunch together sometime soon, Iori. Something outside the office setting. You know... like friends.”

He smiled, and it seemed more genuine than perplexed this time. “I would be delighted, Satsuki-sama.”

Iori showed himself out, and moments later Ryuko stepped into the office, still in her school uniform. After nodding in greeting, she immediately made her way to the glass walls and took a look out over the bay. “Damn, but you've got the best view from up here. How's life at the top today?”

“Endless bureaucracy,” she sighed, stepping out from her desk to join her sister in taking in the sights. “So what sisterly chat do you need?”

Ryuko folded her arms over her chest. “I'm going out tonight,” she said simply.

“Oh,” Satsuki nodded slowly. Of course. It was Friday night, and Ryuko and Mako almost always went out together to celebrate the end of the school week, whether it be dancing, arcades, shopping, or simply a late walk on the beach. She felt her heart sink with disappointment as she realized that she would be spending the evening alone. “I'm sure the two of you will have a good time,” she said, managing a smile.

“Mako's not coming with me,” Ryuko said, not meeting Satsuki's eyes. “I'm taking the bike out for a long ride tonight. I'm about due for some time with Senketsu.”

Satsuki opened her mouth to reply, but could not manage a word. “Time with Senketsu” was generally code for Ryuko needing some space with her grief, even all this time after having lost her companion.

“So... that should give you and Mako some quality time to yourselves tonight,” Ryuko went on, giving Satsuki a lopsided smile. “I'd say don't do anything I wouldn't do, but... that wouldn't be any fun at all.”

“Ryuko,” Satsuki gasped. “I wouldn't..! Not while you...”

“It's okay, nee-san,” Ryuko said softly. “I'm fine, really. I just figured the two of you are at a place where you might be more comfortable taking the next steps without me being in the

room, you know?" Her smile softened, and she looked back toward the scenery. "Once you two are a little more comfortable with each other, then it shouldn't be an issue, but for now, I don't want you holding back because of me."

"Ryuko," Satsuki repeated. "Why... why are you allowing this? No, why are you encouraging this? How is this not hurting you?"

"Don't get me wrong, it's a little awkward," Ryuko admitted, "but I think it's for the best, and... I trust Mako, and I trust you."

"This goes far beyond mere trust, Ryuko," Satsuki said flatly.

They stood in silence for a while before Ryuko spoke again. "It's like this. When you and I were still fighting, back before we learned the truth about one another? Remember that?"

"Of course I do."

"Right. I said some really terrible things to you back then, about your... purity, and when I found out the hard way about our mother... let's just say I've never really forgiven myself for saying those things."

"A simple apology would do. Isn't this a bit much to repay me for some harsh words spoken in battle?"

Ryuko let a breath out between her teeth. "It's more than that, though. When we were fighting... there were lots of times I wanted to beat the crap out of you, but... there were also a lot of times when I wanted us to fuck against a wall."

There was another short silence in which Satsuki did not dare breathe.

"Nui said a lot of really messed-up stuff," Ryuko continued, and now she was blushing, "but she had a point about the whole love-hate thing. Hate really is an attracting force, just like love. I had some... pretty intense dreams about you, let's just say that. Once I found out we were sisters... that kind of took the wind out of both sets of sails, and I figured out that along with never getting to finish our fight, I was also never going to get the chance to... well, finish you off." She sighed tersely. "So I guess I figured that since I can't have you, I'd do what I could to make sure you had a chance with someone who'd be good to you."

"So you decided you'd... loan me your girlfriend?" Satsuki asked.

"Okay, couple things here," Ryuko said, looking back at Satsuki with a slight scowl. "First of all, I'm not loaning anything. Mako's not mine to loan: she's my girlfriend, not my jacket. She WANTS to do this, Satsuki, and more importantly, I want her to do it too. Maybe you haven't figured this out yet, but she loves you. Not just likes, but loves. She's always admired you, and I think she's probably always been attracted to you, but now that we're living together, and now that she knows you're my sister, she's absolutely fallen in love with you."

Satsuki felt her mouth go dry. "Then... am I taking her away from you?" she whispered. "Ryuko, I don't want that..!"

“Y'see, that's where you still haven't figured Mako out,” Ryuko snorted. “Here's the thing: I have no problem with her being in love with you, because I also know she's still in love with ME. No matter what happens between the two of you, I know she'll never leave me. Seriously, this is weird for me too, but honestly? If there's anyone in this world who could wholly, unequivocally love the both of us at the same time, it's Mako. Her heart's big enough that I really think she could give all of it to both of us, and neither one of us would be any worse off for it.”

“Then... what will happen to us?” Satsuki asked in a hushed voice.

“Well, I'M not going anywhere,” Ryuko smirked, “so I guess a lot of that depends on you. If Mako can help you out of your shell to the point where you can feel comfortable enough to hook up with Jakuzure or Gamagori or someone else, then good for you, and we'll throw you a party to celebrate it.” She shrugged, and a little of her blush returned. “Or if you want to stay and play Partial Threesome with us for the next year or two or sixty, that would be great too. That's gonna be up to you, though.”

“Do you...” Satsuki began, but her voice failed her, so she swallowed back the lump and continued. “Do you think that could actually... work?”

Ryuko thought about this for a while, then smiled. “If it were left to you or me? Then nah, probably not. But with Mako in the equation, I really think anything's possible. Even this.”

Friday (part 2)

When Satsuki returned home, she heard Mako in the kitchen, presumably working on dinner, so she gave a quiet, almost timid “Tadaima” and more or less dashed for the bath without waiting for a response. She found the tub filled and steaming already, just as it was every evening, so she hurriedly undressed and washed herself before settling in for a soak.

She wondered if she had ever been quite this nervous in her life, even as she had faced world-ending menaces and the necessary reality of matricide.

It wasn't helping that her mind was treating her to disturbingly cliché mental images, such as Mako in an apron- and nothing else- saying: “Welcome home, Satsuki-sama! Would you like your dinner... your bath... or me..?”

She felt her face heat up, and it was most certainly not from the steam. This would not do at all.

“Okaeri nasai, Satsuki-sama!” Mako suddenly called from the door. “I'm sorry, I didn't hear you come in! Dinner should be ready soon!”

“Um, thank you, Mako!” she called in response. “I'll be... out shortly.”

“Hope you're hungry! I'm making chicken croquettes!”

“That sounds wonderful,” she said in what she hoped was a steady enough tone.

Mako's footsteps receded down the hall, and Satsuki took a deep, slow breath to try to center herself. Honestly, stopping a global conspiracy had been easier than this.

She wrapped the bath up quickly, then hurried back to her bedroom to put on some casual clothes for dinner, as it was too early for pyjamas just yet. Once dressed, she took a look at herself in the full-length mirror, breathed deeply, nodded curtly to her reflection, and exited the relative safety of the room.

Dinner was quieter than usual with Ryuko absent, but Mako carried on as normal, making small talk with Satsuki about school, work, the pleasant turn the weather had taken, and so forth. Satsuki ate somewhat mechanically, giving brief answers to Mako's questions and nodding along with the rest of the largely one-sided conversation. She barely tasted the croquettes, though she was distantly aware that they were quite good: Mako had learned well from her mother.

After they were finished, Mako insisted that Satsuki retire to the living room to take it easy while she cleaned up, and promised to bring tea in short order. Satsuki seated herself on the sofa as requested, but it could not be said that she was really at ease, and before long, she stood once more and walked slowly to the kitchen. From the open doorway she watched for a while as Mako, humming to herself as she went, briefly rinsed the dishes before putting them

in the dishwasher, packed away the leftovers, and set the pots and pans to soak. She then noticed Satsuki's presence, and gave the older girl a look of surprise. “Satsuki-sama?”

“Mako,” Satsuki asked, hearing the catch in her own voice, “what's going to happen tonight?”

Mako blinked at her a few times, then her eyes softened, and she gave Satsuki a small but warm smile. “Whatever you want to happen, Satsuki-sama. Shall we start with tea?”

“Yes, please,” Satsuki whispered.

“I'll bring it out to you, then,” Mako grinned.

Satsuki nodded, then returned to the living room and once again sat on the couch, hands clasping her knees. Mako joined her a few minutes later with the tea, then sat opposite her on the sofa.

After taking a long sip, Mako continued speaking. “Satsuki-sama, this has been all about you from the beginning, so we can do anything you want. We could go out somewhere, maybe do some evening shopping, maybe play some games, maybe get some ice cream... or if you'd rather we can stay in.” Her smile quirked mischievously. “We could cuddle a little, or we could fool around a little, or we could even do a little more like last night. Or... not. We could... gosh, we could even actually watch a movie for a change if that's what you want. The point is, though, that nothing HAS to happen. Whatever you want, Satsuki-sama, really.”

“Ryuko gave us this time alone, though,” Satsuki said quietly. “I suppose I expected...”

“Ryuko-chan wants us to get on with it and have sex,” Mako said with a smile and a roll of the eyes. “It was sweet of her, but this is still about you, Satsuki-sama, I promise. Don't feel like you HAVE to do anything: I'll be fine with whatever you want.”

Satsuki shifted against the cushions, and steadied herself with another drink of her tea. “But what about what YOU want, Mako?”

“That's easy,” Mako shrugged. “I want you to be happy, but I also want you to feel safe. I'm happy to let you lead the way. You can do what you want with me.”

Those words brought an involuntary shiver. “Then wouldn't I be using you?” Satsuki said darkly.

“Would you stop if I asked you to?” Mako asked in reply.

Satsuki's eyes widened. “Of- of course I would!” she stammered.

Another lazy shrug from Mako. “Then you wouldn't be using me. It's like last night, where I gave you permission.” She then shook her head a few times and smiled. “Satsuki-sama, I think you're thinking about this way too hard with your brain. What does your heart want?”

Just like that, Satsuki felt as though an arrow had pierced her looming intellect, causing the air to rush out of it like a balloon, and leaving her staring across the suddenly infinite empty

space of the middle of the couch.

What DID her heart want?

“I think I'd rather stay in tonight,” Satsuki said carefully. “Do you think maybe we could... talk some more?”

“Of course!” Mako smiled, setting her tea on the end-table and turning to face Satsuki, tucking her feet beneath her and clasping her hands in her lap.

The space between them only seemed to be growing, and Satsuki found herself hating it. She reminded herself that Mako had given her permission, and Ryuko had given them the evening. Now was not the time to be cowardly. “Could we perhaps...” she began, but could not bring herself to say “cuddle.” Instead, she frowned, chewed on the thought for a moment, then set her own teacup down and gingerly extended one arm across that gulf between them. “May I... hold you again, Mako?”

Mako smiled happily and scooted across the couch, allowing Satsuki to gather her in her arms, much as she had the night before. Soon Mako was leaning warmly against her, with Satsuki's hands clasped over her waist and her head on the older girl's shoulder.

At this touch, Satsuki felt some of her apprehension melt away, as though getting over the initial hurdle of the first physical contact had been the most daunting part of all. She allowed herself to take a deep breath and let it out in a long sigh. “This feels... good.”

“I agree,” Mako giggled. “Hold me however you like, Satsuki-sama. So what do you want to talk about?”

As soon as the question was asked, Satsuki felt her mind go completely blank, save for the one question that had remained with her all week. “Can you tell me why you're doing this, Mako?”

“Lots of reasons,” Mako said in reply. “But mostly because we love you, Satsuki-sama.”

“We..?”

“Ryuko-chan and I,” Mako explained. “We want you to feel happy, and we want you to feel loved. Because you are. Loved, I mean. We can work on the happy part.”

Satsuki flashed back to the conversation she and her sister had shared that afternoon, as well as Mako's more recent comment about what Ryuko wanted them to do. “Mako,” she asked hesitantly, “are you only doing this because Ryuko wants you to?”

“Of course not,” said Mako. “Satsuki-sama, I know what Ryuko-chan told you today when she went to see you, 'cause she told me about it before she left for her ride. It was all stuff she'd already told me before, too, like the way that she used to have a big foe-crush on you.”

“Oh,” said Satsuki, feeling her cheeks heating up again. “Um... does that bother you?”

“Not as much as it bothered her,” Mako chuckled. “Poor Ryuko-chan, all worried about taboos and things. I tried to tell her that you two have kind of a unique situation: you were raised separately, so the taboo about perverting a familial bond wouldn't really apply, and you're both girls, so the taboo about having weird genetics with children wouldn't apply either. It wouldn't bother ME any if you two started making out with one another, so long as I didn't get left out.”

“Mako!” Satsuki exclaimed.

“It's true, though, Satsuki-sama,” Mako insisted. “I don't know if you had a thing for Ryuko-chan, but she had one for you before she found out about the blood relation thing. If you wanted to, you could kind of grandfather that in, right? I wouldn't judge you.”

Some very uncomfortable imagery was beginning to bubble to the surface, so Satsuki pushed it back down. “Even then, I... I couldn't,” she said, shaking her head against the thoughts. “That comes too close to painful memories, Mako.”

“I'm sorry, Satsuki-sama,” Mako said immediately, turning her head to give Satsuki a look of concern over her shoulder.

“It's fine,” Satsuki said, even though it really wasn't. If she were being completely honest with herself, then yes, she had to admit that she had... appreciated Ryuko in the time before finding out that they were sisters, but that truth had slammed the door on any such thoughts.

Like mother, like daughter?

It was too close. Whatever their intentions, whatever self-justification they might try to give, she could not allow anything that would invoke even a whisper of a doubt that she was becoming her mother. This was a boundary never to cross, as it had so brutally been crossed against her.

“Satsuki-sama?” Mako asked, a catch of worry in her voice now.

“I'm okay,” Satsuki assured her, even as she struggled for a way to get the conversation going again. Anything to get her out of these thoughts. “I must say, I'm a bit surprised.”

“About what?”

“Well... I suppose I'm surprised you know so much about sexuality, and even about social taboos, considering that...” She broke off suddenly, and felt her heart drop as she realized what she had been about to say. She hoped that Mako had not followed that thought.

To her horror, Mako did just that. “Considering that I'm not very smart?” Mako asked, quietly.

“Mako, I...”

“It's okay, Satsuki-sama,” Mako said with a wan smile. “I know I'm not the brightest little candle there is.”

“That wasn't what I meant,” said Satsuki, even though it kind of was. “I... I know school has always been... well, challenging for you, but... you have a very unconventional wisdom, and a way of looking at things that at times I cannot fathom, but which I sometimes envy as well. I always thought of you as something of an innocent, though- the last real innocent left in that world we left behind- and... it appears you know more about love and intimacy than I could ever imagine. It seems like a contradiction, that's all.”

“I AM eighteen, you know,” Mako reminded her.

“I know.”

Mako settled slightly in her arms. “I had a good teacher,” she said at length.

“Ryuko?”

“Oh, no, Ryuko-chan was pretty clueless, actually,” Mako chuckled. “No, I mean... by the time I had my first period, I already knew what was coming. My father taught me all the medical things about being a grown-up woman, but it was my mother who really taught me to understand my body, and to understand sex and sexuality.” Her voice grew somewhat distant as she continued. “A girl growing up in the slums couldn't afford to not understand her body, and what other people might want from it. I know I'm kind of naïve and trusting in a lot of ways, but she made sure I was well-prepared when it comes to that.”

Another involuntary shiver ran through Satsuki as she pictured what those lessons had been like, where the changes in her body were inextricably linked with fear.

Perhaps she and Mako had more in common than she had known.

“I don't know everything about you, Satsuki-sama,” Mako went on, “but I think I know enough to say that your mother taught you about your body in the most hurtful, wrong way possible, and I'm sorry that ever had to happen to you. If you ever need to talk to someone about being a woman, though, I'm sure my mother would be there for you. She adores you, you know.”

“She does?” Satsuki whispered.

“You bet. In fact, I think she already considers you family.”

Satsuki felt her heart cracking as she pictured Mankanshoku Sukuyo and her warm, effortless smile. What a blessing that would be, to have an actual mother in her life...

She realized that she had tightened her arms around Mako, and for a moment, she felt herself flooded with warmth. Family? Truly?

Mako's next words cooled her somewhat, though. “Satsuki-sama, does it bother you that I know about sex and stuff?”

“Bother me?” Satsuki asked, confused at the choice of words.

“What I mean is... does it make you think I'm... a tramp or something?” Mako went on. “Because I wouldn't do this with just anyone. You and Ryuko-chan are special, though.”

“No, no, I don't think that about you at all,” Satsuki whispered, feeling herself clench inside at the tone of hurt creeping into Mako's voice. “I know you better than to think that about you. I just... still don't quite understand why you're so willing to share yourself with me when you already have Ryuko.”

Mako then sat up and turned around to face Satsuki, leaning in so their faces were less than a foot apart. “Because I love you, Satsuki-sama,” she whispered. “You asked before if I was only doing this for Ryuko-chan, and I'm not. She loves you, and she wants you to have someone who'll be good to you and be a lover to you, and since she can't do it herself... well, maybe I can do it enough for the both of us. It really is the both of us, though, Satsuki-sama. I wouldn't be here right now if I didn't love you.”

Satsuki was quite certain that her heart and breathing had stopped completely.

A troubled frown crossed Mako's face. “Now... I also won't ever leave Ryuko-chan: I love her too much for that, and I want to be with her for the rest of my life. If you'll let me, though, I'll be with you, too, for as long as you want me. You asked me before what I wanted, Satsuki-sama, and what I want is to love you. I want to light your heart up. I want you to see yourself the way I see you, and I want you to always know that someone can touch you without taking anything away from you.”

Here, the frown faded, and Mako leaned in still closer. “I'd also like to kiss you, Satsuki-sama, but only if you want me to.”

Heart pounding and mind reeling, all Satsuki could do was nod.

Mako edged closer, and Satsuki felt soft lips touching her own. It was a gentle, lingering kiss, but one that carried the weight of every inexplicable word Mako had just spoken.

“Thank you,” Mako whispered after they broke.

“Of... of course,” Satsuki managed, wondering why she was the one being thanked. She then felt a thunderbolt of realization, and she smiled in an almost embarrassed fashion. “Um, that was my first,” she said sheepishly.

Mako's eyes suddenly seemed very moist. “I'm honored. I... really do love you, Satsuki-sama.”

“I...” Satsuki began, but she could not in good conscience complete the thought the way she wished she could. “Mako, I don't know what I'm feeling yet. I'm sorry.”

“It's okay,” Mako giggled. “Maybe we can find out together, then.”

“I... don't know if I'm ready,” Satsuki admitted.

“That's okay too,” Mako assured her. She then sat back slightly, made a pondering face, and nodded to herself. “I think I'm going to go and brush my teeth,” she said, “then I'll go to my

room, put my pyjamas on, and read for a little while. If you'd rather have some time to yourself tonight, that's fine. If you'd like to sit up with me and read or talk or even snuggle a little, then bring a book and come join me."

Satsuki nodded, though she was a bit bewildered by this change of direction.

"On the other hand," Mako went on, smiling more widely, "if you'd like to play a little, or you think you might be ready to try and let yourself trust my hands like you said last night..." She again rolled her eyes happily. "Then don't bother to bring a book."

She leaned in to kiss Satsuki again, this time a short, warm peck, then got up and left the room. A few moments later, Satsuki heard the water running in the bathroom sink.

For a long time, Satsuki was very still. If she let herself, she could still feel the warmth of Mako lying against her, and the tingle of Mako's lips touching hers.

Somewhere in the background, Mako finished brushing, and then her soft footsteps receded further down the hall, until Satsuki heard a door close quietly.

After a few silent minutes, Satsuki got up from the couch and followed Mako down the hallway empty-handed.

Friday (Part 3)

For just a moment, Satsuki wondered if she should knock. Then, remembering that she had been invited, she instead simply opened the door to the room Mako shared with Ryuko and stepped inside.

Mako was sitting up in bed, propped up against what she called her “sitty-pillow,” with a light novel open in her lap. Upon hearing Satsuki come in, though, she immediately looked up from the pages and smiled. Satsuki saw her eyes dart to her visitor's hands for a moment, and then the younger girl's expression turned to barely-concealed excitement as she noted that Satsuki was not carrying a book of her own.

Even in the midst of her own confusion, Satsuki had to admit that the look on Mako's face was adorable.

“Come sit, Satsuki-sama?” Mako asked brightly, setting the book aside and patting the spot next to her on the bed.

Satsuki eased herself down onto the mattress, but kept one foot on the floor for now. “I'm not entirely certain why I came,” she admitted. “I still don't know what I want to happen, but... I feel like I DO want something, whatever it is.”

“Well, if it'll help, I'll tell you this,” said Mako, repositioning herself so that she was kneeling on top of the comforter with her legs tucked beneath her, almost in a seiza pose. “I know it's different for everyone, but I grew up thinking that sex was serious business, as in the most serious business EVER. I do still take it seriously, since I'd only do it with someone I really love in that way, like Ryuko-chan, or... well, you, Satsuki-sama.”

She then smiled warmly and perhaps a little mischievously. “On the other hand, there's something else I figured out over the last year with Ryuko-chan. Sure, sex can be serious, but what's the good of it being all dramatic all the time? Somewhere along the way we figured out that it can also be the best kind of play that you could ever share with someone you love. It gets to be FUN, too.”

“Really?” Satsuki asked, cocking her head to one side.

Mako nodded rapidly. “You bet it does. So... would Satsuki-sama like to play with me for a while? We don't have to GET anywhere, or even DO anything. We can just play. Would you like that?”

“That sounds... like it could be pleasant,” Satsuki said softly.

“Is there anything you'd like me to do?” Mako asked.

Satsuki took a slow breath, then nodded. “I think I'd like to...” She broke off, then rephrased it. “May I touch you, Mako?”

“Of course,” Mako smiled. “Any way you'd like.”

Another slow breath, and then Satsuki slid the rest of the way into the bed and settled in front of Mako, mirroring her pose. She then brought her hands up slowly and with the greatest care, as though handling an egg or a delicate crystal, she lay her palms against Mako's cheeks and cradled her face. She felt as much as saw the smile widen under her touch. Satsuki then gently caressed Mako's face, trailing her fingers over her cheekbones, her lips, and the line of her jaw.

At this point Mako swallowed, probably out of reflex, and Satsuki traced the movements of the muscles of her throat, down to the space where her collarbones met. She then ran her fingers to either direction along those sleek lines as much as she could before trailing downward. Mako was wearing a loose, button-up flannel pyjama top tonight, but even the thick fabric could not disguise the rise of her breasts, nor could it keep Satsuki from feeling something poking her fingertips from beneath.

“Well, THAT didn't take long,” Mako giggled.

Satsuki gave the younger girl's breasts a soft, slow squeeze, then brought one hand up slightly and hooked her finger over the place where the top button was fastened. “May I see you?” she asked.

The former no-star replied only with a nod, and Satsuki noticed that she was biting her bottom lip and smiling almost shyly. Nonetheless, she reached up to unfasten the top button, as Satsuki eased back to give her space.

To Satsuki's surprise, though, Mako worked very slowly, pausing between each button to pull the shirt just a little further open, showing more and more cleavage with each successive unfastening. Perhaps “striptease” was not quite the correct word, but Mako was certainly taking her time revealing herself, and Satsuki could not look away: she was absolutely mermerised. She began to feel a slowly growing heat inside, not unlike what she had experienced the night before while trying to arouse herself, and she realized that this unfamiliar sensation had a name: desire.

It also occurred to her to wonder how much of her excitement was at the sight of Mako's bare skin, and how much of it was simply because Mako truly wanted to excite her. Had anyone ever wanted this for her before? Had anyone else ever tried to arouse her for HER sake, and not their own?

Once the last button was unfastened, Mako slowly slid the pyjama shirt over her shoulders, arching her back slightly as she did so.

Satsuki had seen Mako's breasts before, without question. There had been the Fall of Honnoji, which of course had ended with everyone naked, and her thought process at that moment had been nowhere in the neighborhood of taking in the sights. There had also been the previous night, when she had been given quite an eyeful from over the girl's shoulder, and then had largely averted her gaze while Mako got dressed again after the encounter on the couch.

Here and now, though, Satsuki could only stare for a long while after the pyjama top dropped to the mattress beneath them.

She was magnificent. Nothing less than magnificent.

Mako's skin was slightly darker than Satsuki's (though Satsuki knew that she herself was uncommonly pale, particularly given her hair color), with just the slightest dusting of freckles on her shoulders, as well as the occasional mole. She had prominent collarbones that Satsuki found herself wanting to kiss and nibble. Her breasts were full and beautiful, and while they were again not as firm as Satsuki's own, they had a shape that suited Mako perfectly, and they seemed to be in constant motion, swaying and bobbing with every breath and twitch Mako made. Her nipples were already quite erect, with the rose-colored areolae bunched up around them. Satsuki could still see faint fabric lines on her skin from the bra she had been wearing, and it was these that she found her fingers drawn to first, following the slight indentation with her fingertips along the undersides of Mako's breasts. While she was certainly not what anyone would call fat (not surprising, given the physical energy she expended just by being herself), Mako had a slight roundness to the belly that seemed more healthy and even feminine than anything else. Her body was smoothness and curves, and Satsuki felt privileged to have this chance to share it.

There was another emotion Satsuki was beginning to feel now, but it was harder to name, and the closest she could come to it was hunger.

“What do you think?” Mako asked in a soft, almost shy voice.

In all honesty, Satsuki was trying not to think at that moment. “You're lovely,” she whispered absently as she took Mako's breasts in her hands. She had felt them just the night before, but it was different now being face to face with Mako, and seeing every flicker of her expression as Satsuki caressed and gently squeezed her.

“Do you like them?” Mako asked.

“I do,” Satsuki said with total honesty.

“Pretty fond of them myself,” Mako nodded. “Especially the way that...” she stopped and took a quick breath between suddenly clenched teeth as Satsuki's thumbs brushed against her nipples.

“The way that what?” Satsuki asked, stopping her hands in their tracks.

“Oh, you can keep doing that as much as you want,” Mako said quickly. “The way that... they're so sensitive,” she then explained. “A lot of people say that bigger breasts don't tend to be as sensitive as smaller ones, so I guess I'm lucky, 'cause oh-God-what-you're-doing-feels-good-right-now.”

“Really?” Satsuki smiled, finding herself enjoying Mako's reaction tremendously. Her ever-so-patient guide in the art of intimacy was looking a little carried away all of a sudden, and it gave Satsuki a visceral thrill to know that she was doing this. The night before, this

realization had been shock more than anything else, but now, with Mako once again moaning and whimpering at her touch...

“Lean back,” Satsuki said next, reluctantly moving her hands from Mako's breasts to her shoulders and pressing back slightly. Mako gave her a curious look, but unfolded her legs, scooted back and once more propped herself against her pillow. Satsuki settled beside her, lying on her side so that she could keep one hand on the other girl, stroking and fondling her soft curves.

“What does Satsuki-sama want to do next?” Mako asked, but then she closed her eyes and arched her back a little as Satsuki's fingers found her nipple. “Or you could just keep doing what you're doing, of course...”

“Let's see,” said Satsuki in a low voice. “What would I like to do, she asks?” She then leaned in a little so that she could say the rest right into Mako's ear. “I think I want to hear you make those sounds again. The ones you made for Ryuko last night? I want you to make them for me.”

“Mmm, Satsuki-sama is really getting into this,” Mako grinned, but there was a slight quaver in her voice.

Her words came as a bit of a shock to Satsuki. She really WAS getting into this, wasn't she? After having been so nervous to even come into the room, now she found herself riding a wave of confidence. “Maybe I'm starting to figure out what I want?” she pondered aloud.

“Does Satsuki-sama... want me?” Mako gasped.

Satsuki smiled widely, finding Mako's deepening blush very much to her liking. “I think I might,” she whispered. “Are you wet, Mako?”

“Very,” Mako nodded.

“May I feel for myself?” Satsuki asked, her voice barely a murmur.

“Please,” Mako nodded again, more quickly this time.

Almost reluctantly, Satsuki let her hand slide from Mako's breasts. As much as she had been enjoying that, though, she felt herself driven to go further than she had allowed herself the night before. She slid two fingers under the waistband of Mako's pyjama pants, then stopped herself. “Would you take these off for me, please?”

At Satsuki's request, Mako raised her hips from the mattress and slipped off the pyjamas and panties in one motion, as Ryuko had done for her the previous night. She then kicked them off her ankles, letting them land where they may.

For a long while, Satsuki did not move: she simply took in the sight of Mako, now completely naked, lying beside her. Her hips were as deliciously curved as the rest of her, and her legs looked surprisingly sleek and strong compared to the rest of her.

Satsuki slowly moved her hand down along the slight rise of her belly, then back into the thick hair between her thighs. Apparently Mako was not one to shave, but Satsuki didn't mind a bit: it was just another sign that this was the body of a woman and not a girl.

It was not long at all before Satsuki discovered that Mako was very wet indeed, and her fingers were quickly coated and slick, even as that unmistakable smell of arousal tickled her nostrils. She ran her fingers up and down slowly, moistening the area around her clitoris as Mako continued to gasp and moan with every rotation. As before, Mako began to rock her hips in time with the motions of Satsuki's fingers, and her breath was growing short and rapid. She parted her legs further, all but giving Satsuki free reign to do as she wished.

However, as she slid her fingers down away from the clitoris again, Satsuki hesitated as she again realized how easy it would be to slip inside her at that moment. “Mako...” she whispered. “May I..?”

“Yes,” Mako said in a tiny, high-pitched voice. “Satsuki-sama... please...”

Pausing for only a moment longer, Satsuki dipped her middle finger into Mako's warm, wet depths, slowly sliding it in as far as it would go. Mako gave a ragged cry and pushed her hips forward, and before Satsuki could withdraw, Mako reached down and held the older girl's hand in place. “Satsuki-sama, wait...” she panted.

“What is it, Mako?” Satsuki asked.

Mako turned her face to Satsuki, and while she was smiling brilliantly, there were tears in her eyes. “Satsuki-sama is inside me,” she quavered. “Satsuki-sama is really inside me.”

“Yes, I am,” Satsuki smiled, feeling an unfamiliar stirring inside as she realized just how much this meant to Mako, above and beyond the simple pleasure of it.

Satsuki then felt a rhythmic squeezing around her finger. “Hello, Satsuki-sama,” Mako giggled. “I've been doing my Kegel exercises!”

“Silly,” Satsuki chuckled. Mako then released her hand, allowing her to slowly rock her finger back and forth. She felt suddenly aware that she really didn't know what she was doing, but Mako seemed to be enjoying it, given the way she moaned with each gentle thrust. Emboldened by her partner's obvious pleasure, Satsuki slipped in a second finger as well, and the cries became suddenly louder and huskier, and the squeezing against her fingers more intense. Even as out of her element as she was, Satsuki could tell that Mako was not merely lying there and waiting to be pleasured: she was very much participating.

Would this be enough, though? Was there more that Satsuki could do to bring her to the edge and over? Clumsily, she tried to position her thumb over Mako's clitoris as she continued pumping her fingers. It was by no means perfect, but Mako gave a strangled cry each time Satsuki's thumb found its mark, and Satsuki could feel the tension in her body growing with each repetition.

“Satsuki-sama,” Mako whispered, then began repeating her name again and again. Hearing Mako calling her name as the orgasm built up inside her was like a symphony in Satsuki's

ears. “Satsuki-sama... Satsuki-sama... Satsuki-samaaaaa..!”

She could tell that Mako was on the verge now, but what more could Satsuki do to push her the rest of the way over? She found the answer as she looked at the rise and fall of Mako's chest with each panting breath. Satsuki leaned in and kissed one of Mako's breasts, then took it into her mouth and swirled her tongue around the stiffened nipple.

That turned out to be the breaking point for Mako, who arched her back so sharply that it seemed that most of her body was levitating above the mattress, and she cried out Satsuki's name one last time, stretching the final vowel into a high-pitched scream of pleasure. Satsuki felt her fingers being squeezed almost to the point of pain as Mako spasmed around her, her entire body shaking as the orgasm hit her with all the force of a hurricane.

Within moments it was over, and Mako settled back onto the bed, a tiny, blissful smile on her face. Satsuki withdrew her drenched fingers, causing that smile to momentarily flinch. Satsuki remembered how sensitive she had been after her own climax the night before, so she carefully lay her hand over Mako's navel, figuring that this would be safe enough.

“Mmm, Satsuki-sama,” Mako said drowsily. “I hope I get the chance to make you feel good, too.”

“I feel pretty good already, actually,” Satsuki smiled.

“Really?” Mako asked, eyes suddenly wide open as she turned to cuddle against the taller girl. “Tell me, tell me! What's making Satsuki-sama feel good right now?”

The question caught her off-guard, and Satsuki had to think about it for a moment. “I feel... satisfied,” she said at length. “It feels good that I was able to... that I could...”

A horrible realization set in, and Satsuki suddenly felt very cold, even where Mako was cuddling with her. It was no secret, really. If she thought about it, the reason she enjoyed it was all too obvious.

“Tell me more, Satsuki-sama?” Mako prompted her, but there was a softness in her voice that implied that she could tell something was wrong.

“This... isn't good, Mako,” Satsuki whispered. “I'm so sorry.”

“Satsuki-sama hasn't done anything to feel sorry for,” Mako said, gently but firmly.

“You don't understand,” Satsuki said, shaking her head slowly. “I enjoyed making you respond to me. I enjoyed... having that power over you.” She felt tears stinging her eyes, and she tried to blink them back. “I was taking from you, Mako. I'm just like...”

In a flash, Mako was on her knees, leaning over Satsuki and staring intently into her eyes. “You are not,” she said with quiet vehemence in her tone.

“You don't understand,” Satsuki repeated, miserably. “It was like I had you at my mercy, and I... liked that feeling of control. That's not okay, Mako, that's...”

“You didn't do anything wrong,” Mako insisted. “You asked me at every step. You gave me every chance to say no. Do you think you would have done that if you were like HER?”

Satsuki gasped at Mako's words, suddenly feeling herself pinned down by the younger girl's gaze.

“Would you have stopped if I'd asked you to?” Mako asked, simply.

After a long pause in which they stared at one another, Satsuki nodded mutely.

A tiny smile crossed Mako's lips. “Then you're fine, Satsuki-sama. There's a big difference between getting off on controlling someone and... enjoying it when you can make someone you... care about feel good. I'm not going to put you on the spot and say 'love,' Satsuki-sama, but you DO care about me, don't you?”

“Of course I do,” Satsuki whispered.

“Then there's nothing at all wrong with what you're feeling. You just gave me a monster orgasm, and if you want to feel proud of yourself for it, be my guest.” She smiled a little wryly, then. “I like to give myself a little high-five in my head whenever I can make Ryuko-chan come. It's not always easy, either, so I get super-happy whenever I can do that for her, 'cause she deserves it.”

Mako then leaned in and gave Satsuki a tiny kiss on the lips. “You didn't take anything from me that I wasn't happy to give you,” she said softly. “I trusted you with my body, and you did nothing to break that trust. I promise.”

Quite suddenly, Satsuki flashed back to her conversation with Gamagori, about the necessary trust between the dominant and submissive partners, and she realized that this had been much the same. Satsuki had certainly been the dominant one, and Mako had willingly ceded control, because she knew that Satsuki would not abuse that privilege. “You... you really do trust me, don't you?” she asked, amazed.

“Of course I do,” Mako smiled, repeating Satsuki's earlier words back to her. Her expression then grew thoughtful. “I wonder, though, Satsuki-sama? Do you find it hard to believe that anyone else could be that trusting because you don't think that YOU ever could?”

“Possibly,” Satsuki nodded slowly. “Maybe deep down I can't imagine letting myself be that vulnerable to anyone.”

“You can be anything with me, you know,” Mako assured her. “I know it's just words for now, but I promise that you can trust me.”

“I believe you,” said Satsuki. “I honestly do. You're the least duplicitous person I've ever met in my life. I just... have trouble letting go.”

Mako again leaned down, this time to put her arms around Satsuki and hold her, pressing her face into the older girl's shoulder. “Are you willing to try?”

“Try what?”

“Letting go a little,” Mako chuckled into her ear. “Trusting me the way I trust you.”

Satsuki felt her breath catch. “What do you mean?”

“I want to touch you, Satsuki-sama,” Mako whispered. “I want to love you, and I want to play with you. I want to show you that it's okay to let go with me, because I'll always have your hand, and I'll always take care of you if you'll let me.”

She once again brought her face up to Satsuki's and stared into her eyes. “Do you want to try letting go a little, just to see what happens?”

Satsuki took a shaky breath. “We can stop whenever?” she asked.

“Definitely. We can stop now, if you want.”

“I... don't want to stop,” Satsuki whispered, shaking her head. “I'll... try, then.”

“Mmm, your turn, then, Satsuki-sama,” Mako smiled.

“My turn?” Satsuki asked.

“One of is wearing too many clothes,” Mako giggled. “Shall we do something about that?”

Friday (part 4)

They started with Satsuki's skirt, more for the sake of mobility than anything else. Once this was removed, they returned to the position of kneeling on the mattress and facing one another. There was no doubt in Satsuki's mind that she was nervous, but she could also not deny that this was tinged with a very real excitement.

“Should we... do things in the same order?” Satsuki asked.

“If you'd like,” Mako nodded. “That way it wouldn't be anything too unexpected. But we can stop whenever you want, of course!”

“I know,” said Satsuki, but then another thought cropped up. “Um... is this how it normally is between two women? Taking turns pleasuring one another?”

“Well, it CAN be,” Mako shrugged. “But there are also things two girls can do to one another at the same time. Really NICE things.”

Satsuki felt her face heat up as she remembered reading about such things. “You're speaking of... tribadism, then?”

“Tribad...” Mako repeated, a look of almost comic confusion crossing her face before she broke out in one of her smiles. “Oh, you mean tribbing! Ryuko-chan and I like to call it 'scissoring,' what with the whole scissor-blade thing and all, but I guess there are ways to do it other than the scissor-position since that can get uncomfortable unless you're really flexible, though I'm guessing YOU probably are, and... Satsuki-sama, you're turning purple: have I said too much?”

“Not at all,” Satsuki lied, trying to force back the blush by strength of will alone.

“I guess I was surprised to hear Satsuki-sama jump in like that. Is that something you want to try?”

“Perhaps... another time,” Satsuki managed.

“Of course,” Mako smiled. “Anyway, that wasn't even what I was talking about.”

Satsuki blinked at her. “It wasn't?”

“Nope,” Mako replied, shaking her head. “I was, um, actually just talking about kissing. The sex part is great and everything, but for feeling good, sometimes a good, long kiss can really warm you up inside.” Her smile deepened, and her eyes took on a bit of a faraway look. “There are plenty of nights that Ryuko-chan and I just kiss and cuddle. I like those nights, too.”

“I see,” Satsuki said slowly, thinking back to the relatively chaste kisses Mako had given her on the sofa. “Could we perhaps try that in a bit?”

“Anything you want,” Mako reminded her.

“I... should continue undressing, then,” Satsuki said next, mostly to herself, as she reached for the top button of her blouse. She found herself a tangle of different emotions, and wondered what had become of the Satsuki who had once confidently proclaimed that she would gladly bare her breasts if it meant furthering her cause. Somehow it was different now, and she was flooded with a sense of vulnerability, of hope and trust, of excitement, and even a strange yet familiar sense of honor in which she felt the need to repay Mako for all the younger girl had done.

Unexpectedly, she found her hands intercepted by one of Mako's before she could finish the first button.

“Um, Satsuki-sama..?” Mako said with an unmistakably shy smile. “Um... may I do this part?”

“Of course,” Satsuki nodded, realizing that she might have a difficult time saying no to those eyes. Mako smiled warmly, and then picked up where Satsuki had left off, unfastening one button at a time. As the undressing continued, Satsuki found that she could not look away from the changing expression on Mako's face.

Mako looked as though all her dreams were coming true, and Satsuki found herself honored and even a little humbled that anyone could look at her in that way. These were not eyes of appraisal or lust or longing: this was gratitude and awe, and yes, love.

Once the last button was finished, Satsuki carefully slipped the blouse over her shoulders and let it drop to the bed, all the while watching the other girl's eyes. To her surprise, though, Mako's face lit up with an unexpected emotion: happiness bordering on glee.

“Oh my gosh, Satsuki-sama, I think that's the cutest bra I've ever seen!” Mako gushed, and suddenly they were simply two girls comparing clothes. “Where did you get it?”

“Um... you like it?” Satsuki asked hesitantly, a bit blindsided by the shift in mood. She'd dressed in such a hurry after her bath that she'd barely paid attention to which bra she'd put on.

“Oh, it's great!” Mako nodded. “It's lacy without being too frilly, and it fits you perfectly, and my GOODNESS look at that cleavage! I have a terrible time finding anything that pretty! I mean, finding an H70 is hard enough, but finding one this cute is almost impossible!”

“I... have them custom-made, actually,” Satsuki admitted, suddenly remembering the fabric lines on Mako's chest. Did she normally resort to ill-fitting undergarments for want of something more comfortable? “I could see about getting some made for you, if you'd like?”

“Would you really?” Mako grinned, her eyes wider than ever.

“Of course. But that aside... Mako, I'm the head of a massive international clothing company. Chances are I could find you anything you wanted. You could have asked me if you needed something.”

“I guess I could have,” Mako said sheepishly. “I just hate asking you for stuff, Satsuki-sama. You've done so much for us already, and... I don't want to take advantage of your generousness.”

That was Mako in a nutshell. From a lifetime of poverty to living with one of the richest women in the world, and she did not want to be spoiled. Perhaps two-star life had been a better lesson to her than even Satsuki had suspected.

Nonetheless. “Mako, look at me,” Satsuki said, with just a hint of her commanding voice.

Mako immediately met her eyes. “Satsuki-sama?”

“Listen to me carefully, Mako. From this day forward, I will not allow your magnificent breasts to be touched by anything but the best. We will find you something that fits, and something that you enjoy wearing.” Her voice then softened. “Please, Mako, allow me this, at the very least.”

“Satsuki-sama is too kind,” Mako said softly.

“I would be grateful for the chance to take care of you in this small way,” Satsuki insisted. Then, feeling a surge of unexpected flirtatiousness, she added: “For the moments Ryuko and I won't be holding them ourselves, that is.”

“Ooh, Satsuki-sama!” Mako grinned, her eyebrows shooting upward into her bangs. “I think you're getting the hang of it!” She then refocused her eyes on the bra. “Yeah, that's gorgeous. Thank you, Satsuki-sama. I'd love a chance to wear something that pretty.”

It occurred to Satsuki at that moment that H70 was not so very far away from her own size. It wouldn't be a perfect fit by any means, but perhaps... “Would you like to try it on?”

“Could I?” Mako said eagerly. “Do you think it would fit me?”

“Close enough to get an idea,” said Satsuki, reaching back to unclasp it and slide the straps down her arm. She had been so comfortable talking clothing with Mako that it wasn't until she felt the cool air of the room against her breasts that she realized what she had just done.

For her part, Mako was now frozen in place, and her eyes had gone wide, staring, and even a little misty. “Satsuki-sama... you're... beautiful...”

“You've... seen them before,” Satsuki murmured, moving her arms to cover herself before forcibly and awkwardly stopping herself. “You were with me for that bath just the other day.”

Mako nodded, and swallowed visibly. “I know, Satsuki-sama,” she whispered, a corner of her mouth turning up in a half-smile. “But... this is the first time you're showing yourself... just for me.”

The tenderness and soft amazement in her voice went straight to Satsuki's heart, and she could not help the hesitant smile that broke free.

“Um... could we maybe wait until later to try on the bra?” Mako asked in a tiny voice, her eyes still drinking in the sight of the girl kneeling before her.

“Of course,” Satsuki almost laughed, realizing that playtime with clothes had ended for now. “Would you like to... touch me?”

“Absolutely,” Mako nodded slowly. “May I, Satsuki-sama?”

“You... you may.”

Very slowly, Mako reached forward, pausing just a finger's-breadth from Satsuki's skin. She then looked up into Satsuki's eyes and gave her a smile of pure gratitude before her hands cupped the taller girl's breasts. Satsuki took a quick breath, feeling a small stab of memory, but these were different hands, and these were different eyes. Mako was not taking possession of her: she was touching her with the greatest care and respect, seemingly content just to be allowed this honor.

“Are they sensitive?” Mako asked softly.

“I'm... not sure,” Satsuki admitted, thinking back to the night before. “I have the feeling they might not be, though. I don't have a lot of experience with this, you know.”

“Am I the first?” Mako asked, her eyes lighting up. “Did I get to be Satsuki-sama's first kiss AND the first to touch her breasts?”

As much as it pained her to do so, Satsuki shook her head. “No, Mako. You... you know that isn't true.”

Mako stared at her for a moment, then to Satsuki's surprise, she moved her hands away and straightened up, a stern look coming to her face. “That didn't count, Satsuki-sama.”

“Didn't... count?” Satsuki repeated, feeling her jaw go slack.

“That's right!” Mako almost shouted, and for just a moment she looked as though she might be on the verge of going into one of her rants. “People who hurt you don't deserve the honor of being your first! You get to choose your OWN firsts, and you get to give them away when YOU want to! No one gets to choose that for you! It didn't count! You get to leave it behind you!”

Before she could suppress it, Satsuki felt a core of fury quickly building up inside her. “I CAN'T!” she snarled.

Mako stood her ground, but Satsuki could see the very real fear in her eyes. “But... Satsuki-sama..?”

The quiver in Mako's voice was enough to douse the fires, and Satsuki tried to take a centering breath. “I'm sorry, Mako,” she whispered.

“I've made Satsuki-sama angry...”

Satsuki shook her head. “I'm not angry with YOU, Mako,” she sighed. “Honestly, I'm not. But at the same time, I meant what I said. I can't just forget that it ever happened, and you have no right to ask me to, even though I know you mean well. What happened to me was REAL, Mako. It was horrible, and there were times it felt like a nightmare, but it wasn't one that I could wake up from. I can't just brush it away: those memories will be with me for the rest of my life.”

Nothing was said for a long time, and then Mako let out a tiny sob, and tears began to spill from her eyes. “That's not fair...”

“No, Mako. But it's reality.”

“It's not fair that she took that from you,” Mako quavered, shaking her head slowly. “Satsuki-sama deserves to be loved, and to share everything with someone who loves her and honors her, and...” She pressed her lips together tightly. “I hate her,” she said miserably, reaching to cover her eyes and messily wipe the tears away. “I hate her for doing that to you.”

Almost without thinking, Satsuki leaned forward and pulled Mako's hands away from her face. Mako had just enough time to look up in surprise before Satsuki closed the remaining distance and kissed her.

“Don't,” she whispered as they broke. “Words of hate do not belong on these lips. She's gone now, Mako, and she'll never hurt me again.”

“She's hurting you now, though,” Mako whispered.

Satsuki closed her eyes. “Only her memory,” she replied, with more confidence than she felt. “It's true that I said those memories will be with me for the rest of my life, but... I want to make new memories as well. Better memories.”

Mako nodded, then ventured a fragile smile. “Then... maybe we can say it's your first time with someone who... loves you?”

“I like that idea,” Satsuki smiled, smoothing the remainder of Mako's tears from her cheeks. “Shall we continue, then? I believe you were in the process of fondling me for the first time?”

“Actually, I touched you the other night, remember?” Mako laughed hesitantly. “We don't have to keep going, Satsuki-sama, if it's...”

“Do not finish that thought,” Satsuki interrupted her, placing a finger to her lips. “Her memory has interfered enough for one night. Please, Mako... make new ones with me.”

There was a long silence, and Satsuki felt a sinking feeling, wondering if the damage had already been done. Then, to her relief, Mako smiled warmly. “I like that idea,” she repeated, kissing Satsuki's finger.

Satsuki leaned back then, arching her back just slightly and thoroughly enjoying the way Mako's eyes were immediately drawn to her breasts. “Now, where were we?”

Mako's smile deepened, and she again reached forward, but this time brought her fingers to Satsuki's shoulders, then gently slid them downward, just barely brushing her skin. Satsuki shivered as they trailed over her breasts and down along the muscles of her abdomen, before Mako reversed the motion and dragged her nails very gently over Satsuki's skin, around the prominent curves and back up to her shoulders. “Maybe they're more sensitive than I thought,” Satsuki whispered. The gentle touch of Mako's fingers against her nipples had been electrifying.

“I'd love to test that theory,” Mako giggled, having apparently regained some of her playful nature.

“Do as you like,” Satsuki prompted her.

Mako nodded, and then surprised Satsuki by leaning in and gently burying her face against the generous curves. Mako then nuzzled her and rubbed against her like an affectionate cat, making Satsuki wonder if she were being scent-marked. Mako's eyes were closed, and her face was an expression of pure bliss. “You're perfect,” she whispered.

“I'm glad you think so,” Satsuki replied, finding herself strangely amused but certainly enjoying the contact.

“May I kiss you, Satsuki-sama?”

Satsuki was about to say that she had already answered that question, but then she realized what Mako meant. “You may.”

With a tiny, happy moan, Mako began to leave a series of kisses over Satsuki's breasts, first feather-light, then more firmly as she made a damp path across the soft skin, always coming close to the nipple but never quite touching it. “Are you... teasing me?” Satsuki whispered.

“Trying to warm you up,” Mako giggled.

“You're succeeding,” said Satsuki, feeling that core of heat moving lower now.

“I'm glad,” Mako whispered, and Satsuki could feel the other girl's breath against her skin. “Satsuki-sama, may I taste you?”

“Do as you like,” Satsuki said again, though she was not certain what this request meant.

A moment later she got her answer, as Mako circled her nipple with just the tip of her tongue, before closing her lips over the sensitive skin and sucking gently. Satsuki gasped as Mako played with the nipple in her mouth, rolling it with her tongue and gently squeezing it against her upper palate.

There was no longer a “maybe” about it: they were indeed more sensitive than Satsuki had thought.

Mako then turned her attention to Satsuki's other breast, repeating the rhythmic sucking, but this time bringing her hand up to play with the moistened, erect nipple she'd left behind.

Satsuki let out a moan of her own, then, and felt an unfamiliar but welcome sensation between her legs which she now knew to be her own wetness and arousal.

“Tasty,” Mako said as she moved her face away, leaving her hands to continue playing with Satsuki's aching nipples. “Thank you, Satsuki-sama. Was that a first time for you?”

“Um, not exactly..?” Satsuki blushed. “I... um... sort of did it to myself last night while I was trying to...”

Mako's eyes bugged. “You can DO that?”

“Um... yes?”

“Wow,” Mako whispered, giving Satsuki a look of awe and amazement before looking down at herself. “I never tried that before. I wonder if I could?”

“Possibly,” said Satsuki. “It... wasn't very good, though. I... liked it a lot more when it was you.”

“Thank you,” Mako said gratefully, but then her face took on a look of playful mischief. “Ooh, I almost forgot! Now that we're both topless, there's something important we need to do.”

“We do?”

“Yep!” Mako grinned. She rose slightly from her seiza position, so that she was closer to eye level with the taller girl, then put her hands to Satsuki's sides and leaned in, jamming their breasts together. “Boob squish!” she sang.

“This is... important?” Satsuki asked cautiously.

“Mandatory,” Mako nodded insistently, wiggling a little so that their breasts slid delightfully against one another.

Satsuki smiled in spite of herself, remembering Mako's earlier words about sex getting to be play as well. “You're a very strange girl, Mako,” she said fondly.

“Maybe,” Mako giggled. “Feels good, though, doesn't it?”

It did at that, Satsuki noted, and more importantly it brought them close enough that she could slip her arms around Mako and hold her. She felt Mako's hands across her back, repeating the gesture, and for a while Satsuki just reveled in the sensation of so much bare skin against bare skin. This was right. This was how it was supposed to be. This was warmth and tenderness and even a little bit of goofy fun to keep the mood light.

Not for the first time, she realized just how much she had needed this.

Their faces were very close together now, so Satsuki took the liberty this time and kissed Mako again, causing the younger girl to melt against her a little as she reciprocated.

As quickly as things had gone from heated to playful, the pendulum swung back just as rapidly, and Mako was beginning to make little whimpering sounds as they continued kissing. Before long, Satsuki found herself sharing another first as she felt the indescribable sensation of Mako's tongue in her mouth. Satsuki did her best to match her partner's actions, and while their tongues neither dueled nor danced, as she had read in so many stories, it was an amazing feeling nonetheless. Satsuki thought back on Mako's words about this being one of the best things that two girls could do together, and found herself wholly in agreement.

However, it was getting more and more difficult to keep this up in their present position, so when they finally released one another to gasp for air, Satsuki guided them back to the pillows and lay back, pulling Mako into her arms so that they could continue more at their leisure.

While their lips joined and they continued deeply drinking in the taste of one another, Mako continued running up and down Satsuki's body with one hand, leaving trails of sensation everywhere she touched. True to her words from earlier in the week, she paid special attention to Satsuki's breasts, stroking and caressing and playing with the still erect nipples, causing that core of heat within Satsuki to intensify with every touch of her fingers.

As wonderful as it was, though, Satsuki wanted more. “Mako,” she whispered between kisses.

“Yes, Satsuki-sama?” Mako replied in a deliciously husky voice.

“Mako, would you...”

“Would I?”

“Would you... touch my...” She couldn't bring herself to finish the sentence. No medical term or trite euphemism seemed appropriate to express her wants. “Mako, I'm so wet,” she whispered instead.

“Ahhhh...” Mako nodded in understanding. “Are you sure, Satsuki-sama?”

In reply, Satsuki raised her hips from the mattress and used her free hand to slide her panties down her legs and off. “Please, Mako...”

“Anything you like,” Mako reminded her, then kissed Satsuki again even as she let her hand glide down toward that core of heat. “Mm, Satsuki-sama shaves?” she asked playfully.

“Not as much as I used to,” Satsuki laughed nervously. “Things were a little different when I wore Junketsu.”

“I can imagine,” Mako giggled. “Are you ready, Satsuki-sama?”

Lacking the voice to answer with words, Satsuki swallowed hard and nodded.

With a touch that was almost surprising in its gentleness, Mako slid her fingers down between Satsuki's thighs. Almost leisurely, almost as though she were exploring some new land, Mako slowly acquainted herself with this most private place, while Satsuki tried

desperately not to name the spots where her fingers paused. This was different. This was not something to be endured, but to be welcomed and enjoyed.

But then, unbidden, she heard that voice again.

"*Open your heart to me."*

Desperately, she tried to chase that voice from her mind, but it was too late, and she was flooded with memories of a cruel, satisfied smile, and of eyes filled with lust and madness. "Mako..." she whispered.

"Satsuki-sama?"

"Say something..."

"What does Satsuki-sama want me to say?"

"Anything," Satsuki cried desperately. "Anything to get her voice out of my head! Please, Mako..."

"Satsuki-sama is so beautiful," Mako said insistently. "I'm so lucky to have this chance to love you. I'm so grateful to you, Satsuki-sama..."

They were just the words that Satsuki needed to hear, but even then, they weren't enough, and she placed her hand over Mako's to still her efforts. "I'm sorry," she said in a miserable whisper. "Please stop."

Nodding wordlessly, Mako instead took Satsuki in her arms and held her tightly while the older girl fought back tears. "I'm sorry, Mako, I'm so sorry..."

"Please stop saying that, Satsuki-sama," Mako said gravely. "You don't need to apologize for this. You're not the one to blame."

Satsuki nodded against Mako. Intellectually, she knew this to be true, but... "I hate this," she whispered. "I want you so badly, Mako, but..."

"You feel vulnerable?" Mako finished for her.

"Yes," Satsuki sighed in defeat. "I wish I could forget it all and say this was the first time for me, Mako, but... I can't. Only one other person has touched me like that, and... even though I know you're not her, and even though I know you're someone I SHOULD be able to trust and let go with..." She shook her head. "You were right: it isn't fair."

Nothing was said for a few moments, and Satsuki felt her heart sink as she wondered how long it would be, if ever, before she could ever let someone make love to her.

"Satsuki-sama," Mako then asked her, "I know this is hard, but could I ask you something?"

"Of course."

“Is it the specific memory of someone... um, reaching down there that triggers it for you? Sort of like the way you said it was hard for you to be held from behind?”

“That was her normal... method,” Satsuki managed. “Sometimes she'd stand behind me and reach around, but other times she'd be in front of me, so she could stare me down, but either way... it was always hands.”

Mako nodded, and her brow furrowed in a look of concentration for a few moments before she tightened her lips and looked into Satsuki's eyes resolutely. “Satsuki-sama, do you trust me?”

“As much as I can,” Satsuki replied, wishing it could be more.

“That'll do for now. Do you still want me?”

“More than I can say.”

For the first time in seemingly forever, Mako smiled. “I'd like to try something, then. Will you let me, please? You don't have to- we could stop right here and cuddle some more instead- but I think you might like this.”

Satsuki stared at her for a time, then nodded slowly.

Now smiling with just a hint of her earlier playfulness, Mako pushed herself up and crept around toward Satsuki's feet. Then, with the utmost care, she gently parted Satsuki's bent legs and gradually settled down so that her head was directly between Satsuki's thighs, and her face...

Satsuki inhaled sharply, realizing the other girl's intentions. “Mako..?”

Mako looked up at her and smiled. “See, Satsuki-sama? Now we're both vulnerable.”

The truth of that statement hit Satsuki like a thunderbolt. Mako was absolutely right: Ragyo would never have put herself in this position. Panic filled her heart, though, as she realized just how dangerous this could be. The warrior in Satsuki had already determined how easy it would be to grip Mako's head between her thighs and snap her neck: what if she felt threatened in the heat of the moment and acted without thinking? “Mako, you can't...” she whispered. “I might hurt you!”

Once more, Mako looked up into her eyes and smiled serenely. “You won't,” she said simply.

The trust expressed in that simple declaration pierced Satsuki's heart, and finally, she felt something inside her letting go.

These were not the words of a tormentor, but a lover.

“May I taste you, Satsuki-sama?” Mako asked again.

She could no longer deny that voice anything, and she nodded.

What followed was nothing short of a whirlwind of sensation as Mako's tongue wasted no time in finding her clitoris. It was truly like nothing Satsuki had ever felt, and the realization that she was truly able to give this “first” to Mako was enough to fill her with a feeling of buoyancy and brilliance. This was something new and wonderful, and it was THEIRS. Ragyo had no power over them here.

Mako was truly lighting her heart up.

She felt Mako's hands sliding up to either side and again finding her breasts, gently squeezing and stroking: not with any particular skill or deftness, as her concentration seemed to be elsewhere, but that added touch served to fan the flames all the same.

So this was how it felt to give yourself to a lover. But which of them was the one truly giving? Could it really be both? Was such a thing truly real after all?

“Mako,” she groaned, realizing that there was one last trust she wanted to give. “Mako... could you... inside..?”

There was a pause, and then Mako made a soft, satisfied sound and slid her tongue downward, tracing between Satsuki's labia before slipping inside her, and it was at this time that Satsuki's world turned completely inside-out. Mako's tongue could not reach far, but even in her current state Satsuki could remember enough of her study to recall that most of the vaginal nerve endings were near the opening anyway, and the motions of that tongue seemed to be hitting every single damned one of them.

Mako was inside her. This was something she had wanted, and had asked for, and it was indescribably wonderful.

It was this realization that rapidly drove her to climax, and she screamed out Mako's name as wave after wave rushed through her. There was again a tiny stab of fear as she realized that she had lost any semblance of control, but she knew that Mako was with her, and would keep her safe and love her as she writhed in pleasure.

When at last the world returned, Mako was once more lying at her side and holding her and gently kissing her, and Satsuki could faintly taste what she knew to be herself on Mako's lips and tongue.

“Mako...” Satsuki whispered brokenly. “Mako, I lo-”

“Ssh,” Mako stopped her, putting a finger to her lips. “Satsuki-sama doesn't have to say anything. Just hold me.”

“But Mako, I... I think I...”

“Then tell me in the morning,” Mako whispered, snuggling against her. “No need for words now, Satsuki-sama. You've already shown me.”

Satsuki nodded against her, already feeling herself slipping away into a warm, blissful sleep. “Thank you, Mako,” she said instead.

“My pleasure,” Mako giggled softly. “And thank you, Satsuki-sama.”

“Please...” Satsuki said in a breathy whisper. “Just... just Satsuki...”

She felt Mako briefly tense in her arms, but only a little, and then she melted further into their embrace. “Pleasant dreams... Satsuki...”

That was the last Satsuki heard before she fell asleep, and on reflection, it was the perfect ending to their evening together.

At some undetermined late hour, Satsuki found herself stirring awake. Mako was still in her arms, but there was another unexpected feeling along with it. There was a sheet over them, for starters, and Satsuki wondered briefly if Mako had covered them before falling asleep.

It was then, however, that she realized that there were more arms around her than Mako's, and she could hear a soft, wheezy breath close to her ear. She didn't need to look to know that Ryuko had returned, and was lying behind her- though on top of the sheet- and was holding both of them protectively as they slept.

Satsuki smiled and drifted back to sleep, feeling safer and more loved than she had ever dared believe possible.

Epilogue

It was The Graduation Party That Almost Wasn't.

Admittedly, they could have gone ahead and had the party even if only Ryuko had graduated, but that would hardly have been fair to Mako. Thankfully, Mako had made the matter academic, pun intended: through a combination of hard work, a creative reward system devised by the sisters, and some extensive therapy for her dyslexia, Mako had managed to squeak through at the eleventh hour, taking herself from barely literate to meeting acceptable high school standards in a matter of just a few months.

The need for intense study had given them less time for intimacy, apart from the aforementioned reward system, and all three of them were beginning to feel a little antsy as commencement and the subsequent party approached, but they made it through somehow, subsisting on stolen kisses and bedtime cuddles for the time being. Nonetheless, it had become obvious over the final weeks that Mako's motivation was at least as much about wanting to have sex with the sisters again as it was graduating high school.

Either way, it worked, and when the day finally came Ryuko and Mako received their diplomas at their new school while Satsuki sat with the Mankanshoku family and watched them proudly. At one point Sukuyo had held Satsuki's hand tightly and said: “I'm so proud of all of my girls,” and Satsuki could not help but get a little misty.

From there it was home for last-minute preparations, and then opening the door to their guests.

For the most part, the party ended up being a reunion of those who had been present for the fall of Honnouji: Iori and the Elite Four, Mikisugi and Kinagase, Hakodate and Fukuroda, Yaguruma and Uwabami and several of the other former club presidents, the entire Mankanshoku clan, Soroi, and even Ogure Maiko, proving once again that Mako was not one to hold a grudge.

Satsuki spent most of the party in the role of observer, content to be in the presence of friends and... yes, family, as strange as the word felt even now. From Mako chatting away with an embarrassed Iori- talking bras, no doubt, given the way Mako kept demonstrating her points by indicating the shape of her breasts- to Ryuko challenging and beating several of the others in arm-wrestling, to Ogure hanging all over Sanageyama in a way that hinted at greater familiarity than Satsuki had known, to Gamagori trying to keep up his stoic demeanor in spite of the ridiculous party hat Mako had put on him... none of it escaped her eyes.

Eventually, though, Satsuki found a small hand in hers, and then Nonon was wordlessly dragging her out to the rear balcony and sliding the door closed behind them, leaving them alone in the evening air. “Okay, Satsuki-chan, enough of the silent treatment. Come clean.”

“I beg your pardon, Nonon?” Satsuki smiled bemusedly.

“That's what I'm talking about, right there!” Nonon almost shouted, pointing one finger directly at Satsuki's face. “You're smiling!”

“Is that so strange?”

“What's strange is that you've been doing it a lot lately, Satsuki-chan. What gives?”

Satsuki arched her eyebrows at her oldest female friend. “Is it such a bad thing that I'm smiling, then?”

“Of course not!” Nonon sighed, throwing up her hands in exasperation. “But you've been doing it a LOT in the last couple of months, and since my best friend hasn't TOLD me anything, I'm stuck wondering why. So are you gonna tell me what's got you in such a good mood lately or not?”

“I... wasn't aware that my behavior was so unusual,” Satsuki said evenly, then took a sip of her punch to cover her expression.

Nonon narrowed her eyes. “You're getting laid, aren't you?”

Even the unflappable Kiryuin Satsuki couldn't stop herself from sputtering on her drink, and Nonon gave what could only be called a triumphant scowl. “I KNEW it! You ARE, aren't you?”

“I may have... indulged in certain acts of intimacy, yes...” Satsuki managed.

“And you didn't tell me... WHY?”

“I'm... I'm sorry, Nonon, truly,” Satsuki bowed in apology. “So much has happened, and... I have had difficulty understanding it myself at times, never mind trying to explain it to someone else.”

“Whatever, water under the bridge,” Nonon waved dismissively, then gave Satsuki an intent look. “So who is it? Spill.”

“I...” Satsuki started, but her voice locked up on her.

Nonon shook her head. “No, let me guess. Hmmm. I'm pretty sure it's not Toad-boy, 'cause he probably would have broken things off with me out of a sense of honor, poor doofus.”

“It's... not Ira,” Satsuki nodded.

“Hmmm. Iori, then? He's been wanting to lay more than fashion on you for years now, you know.”

“I thought he and Inumuta...”

“Oh, he and Doggie have got that Ambiguously Gay Duo thing going, sure,” Nonon snorted, “but I don't think they've ever sealed the deal. Hmmm... Monkey's been getting his knob polished by the Exile, so probably not him either...”

“It's no one from the inner circle,” Satsuki sighed. “Honestly, Nonon, even if things hadn't happened as they have, to choose one of you over the others would break my heart. You must know that.”

Jakuzure's face softened. “I know,” she frowned. “Much as I might have hoped otherwise sometimes.”

“I'm sorry, Nonon...”

Another dismissive wave. “Ehh, don't worry about it. More important things to think about now, like figuring out who's been slipping the sausage to my best friend.”

Satsuki raised her eyebrows again at Nonon's colorful choice of euphemism. “Maybe there's no 'sausage' involved at all.”

“Hmm, how about...” Nonon started, but then Satsuki's words seemed to register, and she slowly turned wide eyes on her old friend. “Wait a second. You're... sleeping with another girl, Satsuki-chan?”

“Do you disapprove?” Satsuki asked.

“Of course I don't disapprove!” the former band-leader shouted, waving her hands in the air. “But Satsuki-chan, if you wanted a little lickety-split in your life, why the HELL didn't you ask ME?”

“Didn't I just say..?”

“Well, this changes everything,” Nonon interrupted, once again putting on a look of concentration. “I need to revise my list of candidates, and...” She paused, and narrowed her eyes again. “Oh, dear God, it's not Transfer Student, is it?”

“It's not Ryuko,” Satsuki nodded. “She and I have become very close, Nonon- closer than I ever thought we would- but there are lines we will not cross with one another.”

“Well, if it's not her, then who in the...?”

The balcony door slid open slightly, and Mako all but cannoned through, grabbing Satsuki in one of her leaping hugs. “Satsuki~!” she sang. “It's almost time for cake and karaoke! Wanna sing a duet with me?” She then turned and noticed Nonon's presence as well. “Hello, Jakuzure-senpai! Erm, or is it Jakuzure-san now? Are you enjoying the party?”

There was a long silence, and then Nonon stood to her full height, such as it was, and pointed dramatically at Mako. “YOU!”

“Me?” Mako asked, eyes widening.

“YOU'RE HAVING SEX WITH SATSUKI-CHAN!” Nonon shrieked, probably loudly enough to be heard by the entire party.

“Oh!” Mako exclaimed, looking up at Satsuki with startled eyes. “Were we going to start telling people, Satsuki? I'm fine with it if you are, but..!”

“IT'S TRUE?!” Jakuzure yelped.

“Enough, Nonon,” Satsuki said evenly, raising one hand to forestall her friend's histrionics. “It's true. Mako and I have been lovers for a few months now. She has... helped me through very difficult times... she still IS, to be honest... and she has shown me happiness that I never believed I could experience in my life. I'm sorry I kept it from you, Nonon, but we wanted to wait a bit longer before we told anyone.”

“But... but...” Nonon sputtered, looking from one of them to the other. “What about Transfer Student? Did you dump her, or what?”

“Oh, no!” Mako smiled happily. “Ryuko-chan and I are lovers too!”

Nonon was beginning to sound like a record with a stuck needle. “You... you..!”

“It is an unusual arrangement, I will freely admit,” said Satsuki, placing one arm around Mako's shoulders and pulling her in for a small sideways hug, “but it has been good for all three of us, I daresay. Please, Nonon. Your understanding would mean a great deal to me.”

For a few moments, Jakuzure looked as though she might explode with a string of creative expletives, but then she straightened up again and looked Mako in the eye. “Well then, Underachiever,” she said in a low voice, “I guess I have just one thing to say to you.”

Mako shrank back slightly, and Satsuki tightened her arm around the younger girl's shoulders, uncertain of where Nonon would take things.

To her surprise, though, Nonon took a step closer to Mako, and then bowed deeply to her. “Thank you... Mankanshoku-san. I don't know how you did it, but you made my best friend smile again, and... I'm grateful to you.” She then straightened up and let out a sigh. “And PLEASE don't tell any of the others I just did that.”

Suddenly close to tears, Mako sprang forward and grabbed Nonon in one of her backbreaking hugs. “Thank you, Jakuzure-senpai!”

“Okay, okay, that's plenty!” Nonon grumped, but she made no immediate move to push Mako away. “Stop being nice to me, dammit: it makes it harder to be jealous of you.”

“I hope we can be good friends, Jakuzure-senpai,” Mako beamed. “After all, we both love Satsuki, right?” She then turned that smile toward Satsuki. “Maybe we should invite her over for Movie Night sometime!”

Satsuki furrowed her brow at this seeming non-sequitur, but then Mako winked at her slyly, and the implications hit. “Movie Night, eh..?”

Clean-up would have to wait until morning.

Once the last guests departed, Satsuki, Ryuko and Mako immediately adjourned to the bedroom for a far more personal celebration. They began by putting on some dance music and each taking turns giving a striptease for the other two- first Ryuko, then Mako, and finally Satsuki- before continuing the dance together with Mako pressed between the two sisters, skin to skin to skin. There were deep, frantic kisses and slow, languid grinding, there were whispered moans and gleeful catcalls, until finally Mako had had enough and directed Ryuko and Satsuki to lay on the bed, side by side but with enough room for her in the middle.

Mako then knelt between them, kissing them one at a time by necessity but always keeping one hand on each, and her fingers felt electric on Satsuki's skin. Normally they would take their time with foreplay, but tonight was different: they had been waiting entirely too long to have this chance again, and Satsuki was already feeling that core of heat and wetness. She looked to her side to see Ryuko looking back at her, eyes dark with arousal and a knowing smile on her face. Satsuki extended her hand toward her sister, and Ryuko took it in hers, which was the unspoken signal for Mako to do as she wished.

It had taken a long time for Satsuki to be able to accept Mako's fingers rather than her tongue, but then one night Ryuko had held her hand, and somehow this had broken a barrier in Satsuki's mind. Knowing that her sister was there to protect her from those memories had allowed her to let go that much further, and from then on this had been Ryuko's way of participating in Satsuki's pleasuring. There were still barriers that the sisters would not cross, as Satsuki had told Nonon earlier, but they had become very comfortable with one another in the process of sharing the unstoppable force that was Mako. They would even occasionally add flirtatious comments to their conversation, usually in the form of Ryuko expressing her jealousy over Satsuki's “perfect ass,” or Satsuki teasingly using Mako's words to refer to Ryuko's “great rack,” but it went no further than that, nor did it need to.

Now Mako's very talented fingers were inside her- inside both of them at once- and Satsuki heard her own moans echoed by Ryuko as their lover smiled down at them. The heat quickly built within Satsuki, but she did her best to keep herself centered for now. Over time they had discovered, ironically, that Satsuki was on the whole more easily orgasmic than Ryuko, at least once she had become more comfortable and trusting with her very understanding partner.

She was not “cured,” and knew that she never would be: as she had told Mako the first time they had made love, the memories of her mother would never leave her. There were still nightmares, and there were still nights when the closeness became too much and she had to stop before things became too heated. There were still days that she cried, whether into Mako's arms, Ryuko's, or more frequently both, and there were still times when she felt unworthy of the love she was given.

She also knew, or at least hoped, that these moments would become increasingly less common, and to her contentment, she was making new and better memories with two women who loved her each in their own way, but each of them with all her heart.

Satsuki felt the fingers interlaced with her own beginning to tremble as Ryuko's grip intensified. The knowledge that her sister was on the verge as well was enough to carry

Satsuki the rest of the way, and their simultaneous cries of joy and passion echoed off the bedroom walls.

A few deep breaths later, Satsuki looked up at Mako, who was regarding her lovers with an expression of adoration and not a little satisfaction, probably due in part to their synchronized climax. Satsuki smiled up at this girl who had so thoroughly changed her life, then once more looked over to meet Ryuko's eyes. They nodded to one another, then as one being, they rose from the bed, gently spun Mako around, tackled her to the mattress and proceeded to ravish the living hell out of her.

“So tell me, Mako,” Satsuki murmured at length, once the three were safely cuddled under the covers with Mako nestled between the two sisters. “What exactly did you mean by inviting Nonon over for Movie Night?”

“She WHAT?” Ryuko protested, but she was smiling as she gently poked Mako in the forehead with her forefinger. “Geez, how many times do I have to tell you, Mako? We are NOT building you a harem!”

“I didn't mean for me!” Mako exclaimed. “I just... thought maybe she might like to see a movie with us!”

“Uh huh,” Ryuko nodded, her mocking tone indicating that she didn't believe it.

“Well, okay, MAYBE I thought something else might POSSIBLY happen over the course of time, but... I didn't mean for me!”

“Then what did you mean?” Satsuki asked, genuinely curious.

“Well, sometimes it doesn't seem fair,” Mako sighed. “I've got both of you, but you've only got one of me, and I'm always worried that one of you is going to feel left out sometimes. I mean, I've got two hands and two boobs, but I've only got one mouth and one...”

“Oh, I get it,” Ryuko chortled. “What happened, Mako? You don't think you're woman enough for the both of us anymore?”

“Ryuko-chan!” Mako cried.

“That's enough, imouto,” said Satsuki. “Do not taunt our Mako.”

“Sorry, sweetie,” Ryuko smiled, kissing Mako on the cheek. “So what would that be, anyway? Are we talking a foursome, or would it wind up being two couples?”

“I just... worry,” Mako said, burrowing her face into the covers. “I love what we have, but... Satsuki, if you want more now, I don't want you to feel like you can't have it, that's all.”

“You know, this is kind of a miracle,” Satsuki smiled.

Both Mako and Ryuko turned to look at her in the near-darkness. “What do you mean, nee-chan?” Ryuko asked.

“The fact that we can even have a conversation like this, about the direction my love life might be taking?” Satsuki was starting to feel a little choked up as she thought about it. “The fact that there are possibilities for me at all, after so many years of thinking I could never have this? It's truly a miracle, as are the both of you. I am no expert in matters of the heart, but I know that I love you with all of my being.”

“Satsuki...” Mako whispered, turning over to hug the older girl and kiss her at the base of the throat.

“I dare not guess what the future holds,” Satsuki went on, tightening her arms around Mako and reveling in the feeling of their naked bodies pressed close to one another. “For now, though, all I want is right here.”

“Sounds good to me,” Ryuko nodded, cuddling in close to sandwich Mako between them.

They said nothing more that evening, but instead fell into a peaceful sleep. Satsuki and Ryuko kept one hand clasped and resting over Mako, who from time to time would roll over to cuddle against one of them or the other. Whatever possibilities the future might hold, Satsuki was content to enjoy this feeling tonight, and perhaps for every night yet to come.

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